

Herb of the Month: Echinacea purpurea

Last month there was a lot of buzz around a study conducted on Echinacea. We would like to clear up some of the myths presented.

First of all, the study was conducted with *Echinacea angustifolia*, which we do carry in bulk and in a few other products. However, most commercial herbal companies now use *Echinacea purpurea* root or a combination of root and the whole plant. These extracts or herbal preparations are tested and made to a medicinal quality and a set standard testing is implemented using a variety of scientific analyses. You will find the *Echinacea purpurea* variety in most of our formulations.

Another issue that needs to be cleared up regarding this study is the dosage and quality of herbal preparation used. One unfortunate choice of the university staff and students is that they made their own extracts of the *Echinacea angustifolia*. It was not disclosed how this extract of *Echinacea angustifolia* was made or what part of the plant was used (whole plant, root, stem, leaf, flower, seed, or the powder of any of the plant parts) or what state the herb was in - raw or dried. Herbalists know the medicine will only be as powerful and strong as the product you start out with. Most herbal formulators make their medicines from the freshest herb possible. Another unfortunate choice of the medical university is that they used approximately 1/3 of the normal recommended dosage one should take per day to get a positive effect from Echinacea. The recommended dosage is 5 ml per day taken in 3 intervals. Hopefully this clears up some of the inconclusive statements of this media blitz.

The Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) is a beautiful tall stout perennial. Native to North America, this form of Echinacea is easier to cultivate than the other varieties and is favored by most gardeners. *Echinacea purpurea* grows from 2 to 5 feet tall with large purple flowers radiating from the cone shaped center that reaches 1 to 2 inches in height with greenish-yellow, speckled pollen. The flower has a single stem covered with bristly hairs and narrow, forest-green leaves. *Echinacea purpurea* grows in poor, rocky, slightly acidic soil in full sun, but it thrives in richer soils. It takes three to four years for the roots to grown to a mature state for medicinal quality usage. Harvesting happens in the fall after the plant has gone to seed and before the first frost. Native American Indians used Echinacea for medical purposes more than any other plant. The upper Missouri and Great Plains Indian tribes used the fresh root and applied poultices to wounds, insect and snake bites, stings, and many types of skin diseases. These native peoples also used it as an herbal mouthwash for painful teeth and gum issues as well as a treatment for coughs and cold symptoms. Samples of Echinacea have been excavated from archeological digs dating as far back as 400 years. In the mid-1800s until the early 1930s the Eclectic Physicians learned about this herb from Native Americans and used it in their treatment of various infections. In the 1800s, European communities became familiar with this herb from early settlers that brought it back to their homeland. Today hundreds of pharmaceutical preparations are made from this herb including extracts, salves, toothpaste, mouthwashes, and capsules.

Echinacea purpurea consist of these main constituents: Glycoside, echinacoside, echinacin, polysaccharide, polyacetylenes, isobutylalklamines, resin, inulin, sesquiterpene and essential oils including humulene and caryophyllene, vitamin B2, vitamin C, and minerals including chromium, iron, manganese, niacin and selenium. The maximum benefit is most likely derived from synergistic interactions between several of these compounds, which are antibiotic, antiseptic, depurative, anti-inflammatory and digestive in their application. Primary uses of the purple coneflower are for colds, coughs, flu and upper respiratory conditions, enlarged lymph glands and sore throat, also urinary tract infections and other minor infections. Echinacea is a great non-specific immune stimulator igniting the overall activity of the cells responsible for fighting all kinds of infection. Unlike antibiotics, which are directly lethal to bacteria, Echinacea makes our own cells more efficient in attacking bacteria, viruses and abnormal cells. The most consistently proven effect of Echinacea is in stimulating and encouraging white blood cells and lymphocytes (killer T-cells) to attack invading organisms. It facilitates wound healing, lessens symptoms of and speeds recovery from viruses and externally is useful against inflammatory skin conditions including psoriasis and eczema and may also increase resistance to candida, bronchitis, herpes and other infectious conditions. Over 500 scientific studies have documented the chemistry and clinical applications of this powerful herb. According to the German Kommission E, Echinacea should not be used in progressive systemic and autoimmune disorders such as tuberculosis and lupus or AIDS. As with many herbs, the use should not extend over two weeks in a row with out a rest for three to five days before continued use.