

## **A Plant I Couldn't Do Without**

### **Rob Cole**

How could I write a piece about this subject without referring to Echinacea ?

This is definitely the plant which I could not do without, and which has brought me so much enjoyment over the years since 2005 when I sowed my first seeds from the then newly introduced 'Art's Pride'.

The range of forms and colours which my seedlings have produced has been remarkable, and every year in late July and August I have the excitement of going to look at the latest batch of seedlings coming into flower for the first time, and then selecting and potting up the 'very best' from which to collect seed for next year's batch. I have now also started to propagate many of these 'very best' to try to build up their numbers, but only after three or four years of their survival which is the final stage of assessing their worthiness. Large numbers of the seedlings find their way onto the compost heap though, and my wife is ruthless in her condemnation of any borderline selections!

Indirect pleasures from my dallings with Echinacea have been an appearance on 'Gardeners' World', an article in Gardens Illustrated, a piece written by Bob Brown in 'Gardening Which', a short piece in 'Garden News', an article which I wrote for the HPS journal, and being asked to join the RHS Five Year Trial of Echinacea at Wisley as one of the assessors. None of these would have happened if I had not become fascinated by the genus, some fifteen years ago now. They may have a reputation for being short lived, but my passion is long lasting.