

TREES AND PLANTS

SMOOTH CONEFLOWER

ABOUT

The Smooth Coneflower (*Echinacea laevigata*) is an herbaceous plant closely related to the common Purple Coneflower. Also known as the Smooth-purple Coneflower, it is a member of the Sunflower family. It is a perennial herb with a fleshy rootstock and coarse, lancet-shaped, rough leaves at the base of the plant. It grows up to 1.5 meters tall and the stems are smooth. They usually produce single flowers, which are light pink to purple in color, and the petals look droopy. The Smooth Coneflower likes sunny, open sites with low competition from other plants – usually in magnesium and calcium-rich soils. The Smooth Coneflower can be found in Georgia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia.

DID YOU KNOW?

Since its discovery, more than half of the known populations of the Smooth Coneflower have been destroyed, mainly because of agricultural clearing, as well as residential and industrial development. Historically, it has always been a rare plant. There are a total of 23 existing populations of this attractive plant, 13 of which are in decline and only one of which is increasing in size. It is likely that this species relies on fire and large herbivores to maintain the open conditions it likes and requires for survival. Native Americans may have set the needed fires, which once created prairie-like areas among southeastern forests, prior to European settlement. (There was no policy then of fire suppression, as there is now.) Little is known of the pollinators or seed dispersal of this plant, and 11 of the remaining populations contain less than 100 plants each. 71% are on roadsides, rights-of-way, or adjacent to trails.

For more detailed information visit: www.centerforplantconservation.org.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

How many Smooth Coneflower populations exist?

- a) 71
- b) 26
- c) 100
- d) 23

Answer is D.

