

RUDBECKIA

Common Names: Coneflower, black-eyed Susan

Family: *Asteraceae*



Songs have been written using the “black-eyed Susan” which is a native of North America. In 1730 Linnaeus named the coneflower after Olaf Rudbeck the Younger who was a teacher at Uppsala University and whose father founded its botanical garden. Both father and son were leading scientists and botanists. The two wrote a book called *Campus Elysi* that described all of the known plants of the time. Because of a fire most of the volume was destroyed. When in his sixties Rudbeck the Younger was writing a thesaurus of Asiatic and

European languages when he met Linnaeus. The Younger was hired by Linnaeus to tutor his three youngest children and the two men became great friends.

Linnaeus had an amazing theory about plant reproduction. He learned that by counting the male organs (stamens) and female organs (pistils), anyone who could count could sort plants into one of twenty-three classes. Thus began the system of classification in the early 19th century. Because this idea of reproduction was considered very sexual, he called the stamen “husbands” and the pistils “wives” and the flower was the marriage bed. Teaching botany was considered X rated and the bishop of Carlisle wrote the “nothing could equal the gross prurience of Linnaeus’s mind.”



Linnaeus had been so poor that he used to block the holes in his shoes with paper and he was often short of food. But in the Rudbeck home the days of poverty were over. Rudbeck was honored to have the coneflower named after him. Though neither Linnaeus nor Rudbeck are often remembered, the black-eyed Susans are prolific. Rudbeck was also prolific in having three wives and twenty-four children.

There is another floral black-eyed Susan, the greenhouse vine *Thunbergia alata* that came from South Africa in 1773 and is often grown in America as a summer annual. Carl Peter Thunberg, a pupil of Linnaeus, discovered this black-eyed Susan.