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Ratibida columnifera

[Synonyms : *Lepachys columnaris*, *Lepachys columnaris* var. *columnaris*, *Lepachys columnifera*, *Lepachys columnifera* var. *columnifera*, *Obeliscaria columnaris*, *Obeliscaria pulcherrima*, *Ratibida columnaris*, *Ratibida columnaris* var. *columnaris*, *Ratibida columnaris* var. *pulcherrima*, *Ratibida columnifera* var. *appendiculata*, *Ratibida columnifera* subsp. *pulcherrima*, *Ratibida columnifera* var. *pulcherrima*, *Rudbeckia columnaris*, *Rudbeckia columnaris* var. *columnaris*, *Rudbeckia columnifera*]

OBELISK FLOWER is a perennial. Native to western North America (from British Columbia to New Mexico), it has daisy-like, yellowish-brown conical-centred, yellow to red (or in part or whole brownish-purple) flowers.

It is also known as Columnar coneflower, Columnar prairie coneflower, Grey headed coneflower, Long head coneflower, Long headed coneflower, Mexican hat, *Mexikohatt* (Swedish), Niggerhead, Prairie coneflower, Red hats, Redspike Mexican hat, Thimble flower, Upright prairie coneflower, Yellow coneflower, and Yellow mexican hat.

The centre of the flower emits an anise-like scent (sweet cicely, *Myrrhis odorata* and/or aniseed, *Pimpinella anisum*) if bruised.

Columnifera is derived from Latin *columna* (pillar, pole, column) meaning ‘columnar’.

For some the shape of the flower is reminiscent of the traditional Mexican sombrero (with its high centre and broad brim) often worn on high days and holidays.

The Lakota North American Indians are said to have used this plant for treating urinary disorders in horses.

Some Indian tribes boiled the flowers to obtain an orange-yellow dye.

The flowerheads (or the leaves or plant tops) were infused as a tea substitute by local North American Indian tribes, including the Lakota and Oglala, which was taken not least to ease stomach ache or headaches, epileptic fits, coughs and fevers. Cheyenne North American Indians applied a solution made by boiling the leaves and stems to ease the extreme discomfort caused by contact with poison ivy (*Rhus radicans*) and also to draw out the poison in rattlesnake bites. For the Zuni a plant infusion provided an emetic – while the Acoma and Laguna are believed to have rubbed the crushed leaves on nursing mothers’ breasts when weaning a baby off its mother’s milk.

Obelisk flower is familiar cultivated as an ornamental garden plant.

Livestock generally enjoy grazing on the plant (particularly young growth) as, sometimes, do white-tailed deer – although in some areas its is said that cattle avoid it. The seeds can be eaten by wild turkeys and other birds.