

Rudbeckia hirta

[Synonyms : *Helianthus hirtus*, *Rudbeckia bicolor*, *Rudbeckia flava*, *Rudbeckia gloriosa*, *Rudbeckia longipes*, *Rudbeckia serotina*]

BLACK-EYED SUSAN is a bristly annual, biennial or perennial. Native to eastern North America it has daisy-like maroon to black domed-centred, pale to golden-yellow flowers. It is also known as Annual rudbeckia, Black-eyed daisy, Brown Betty, Brown daisy, Brown-eyed Susan, Bull daisy, Bull's eye daisy, Cone flower, Darkey-head, English bull's-eye, Gloriosa daisy, Golden Jerusalem, Hairy rudbeckia, *Kesäpäivänhattu* (Finnish), Nigger daisy, Niggerhead, Nigger teats, Ox-eye daisy, Poor-land daisy, Poor-man's daisy, Purple cone-flower, *Rudbeckia* (Dutch), *Sommarrudbeckia* (Swedish), *Třapatka srstnatá* (Czech), Wild golden glow, Yellow daisy, and Yellow ox-eye daisy.

The plant has a rosette of leaves in its first year and flowers the year after.

The flowers are pollinated by bees that can see them at surprisingly long distances because ultra-violet light is reflected on the petal tips.

Warning – the leaves may cause dermatitis.

Hirta is Latin (shaggy, hairy, rough, prickly) meaning 'hairy'.

The Potawatomi North American Indians used the flowers to dye the rushes they wove into matting yellow.

But records suggest that the plant was particularly familiar to many tribes as a source of medicine including the Chippewa who gave it to their children. Both the Cherokee and Iroquois tribes used it to treat worms (the latter especially in children), while the Potawatomi took a root infusion to ease colds. The Iroquois also used it for heart problems, and the Shuswap tribe turned to it for soothing sore eyes. Cherokee Indians treated fluid retention, some female problems, venereal disease, snake bites, earache and skin sores with it.

Black-eyed Susan is said to have attracted an unusual distinction in being one of the few plants to have migrated from west to east across the North American Continent – probably in bales of hay.

Today this plant is often considered to be invasive in agricultural areas. Apparently in the 1920s if at no other time black-eyed Susan seems to have held some fascination for botanists as it appears to be able to mutate easily in the wild.

The flower was adopted by Maryland in the United States as a state emblem in 1918.

Presumably the plant had been introduced to England by the early 18th Century as authorities note that the English poet, John Gay (1685-1732) writes of it in his *Sweet William's Farewell to Black-ey'd Susan*.

All in the Downs the fleet was moor'd,
The streamers waving in the wind,
When black-ey'd Susan came aboard.
"Oh! where shall I my true love find!
Tell me, ye jovial sailors, tell me true,
If my sweet William sails among the crew."