

Birds from page C1

All but the children's houses will also be judged in categories of architectural creativity, craftsmanship, most creative, a student award and best of show. The show winner will receive \$2,000.

"Based on what we've seen from our entrants the creative spirit is alive and well in Southeast Michigan," said James Greely, general manager of Troy's Somerset Collection. "A goal (of the show) is to get people thinking about new possibilities for their living environment."

The birdhouses are part of a 3,000 square-foot garden display including trees, 1,200 square feet of brick pavers, and plants like crab trees, rhododendrons, hydrangea and tulips. Created by Great Oaks Landscape Associates of Novi, the garden also contains a glass conservatory from Canterbury Conservatories in Holland.

Tiseo Architects, of Farmington Hills, built a cubed birdhouse with Plexiglas and steel. The 1.4-foot by 1.4-foot Plexiglas cube sits on a 9-foot steel tube intended to prevent squirrels from helping themselves to birdseed.

"The architects said they didn't want to rival a bird's natural ability to build a home.

Designer Agnieszka Coletta said: "We knew we could never compete with a bird's ability to create a house. What we've created is a secure, protected environment for them to build their own home while giving us an opportunity to look inside at what they're doing."



Artists: Rebecca Gloit (left) and Crystal King of Hamilton Elementary School in Troy put the finishing touches on a birdhouse that is now part a display at the Somerset Collection's Home and Garden Show.

The Hamilton students used acorns, gemstones, twigs and paint to create their homes.

Echinacea gives interest to garden

If you want an easy-to-grow plant in your garden that gives lots of color and interest, you can't go wrong with Echinacea, the plant chosen as the Herb of the Year for 2002.

GARDEN SPOT



MARTY FIGLEY

It is also known as purple coneflower or rudbeckia. There are several species and each one is a little different.

The flower changes as it matures. It begins as a pale pink color with thin, downturned petals (ray flowers), then gradually turns a deeper purple as it gets larger. Then the prickly center cone, which gives the plant its common name, becomes more conspicuous and turns a burnished copper color. It sometimes glisters.

The name also may come from the hedgehog, the animal with many spines on its back, which is in the genus *Echinaceae*, spelled very like the flower's botanical name, *Echinacea*.

If you choose to remove spent flowers during the summer, the plant continues to bloom. I personally like to leave those attractive heads for winter interest in the garden.

Not only does coneflower provide beauty in the garden, it is a great nectar plant for butterflies and hummingbirds; small birds eat the seeds.

Coneflowers like sun, but full to partial sun will do all right. They do well in acidic to neutral soil, average to dry, although the species in general cultivation is usually grown in moist, fertile soil.

The plants are easy to start



PHOTO BY MARTY FIGLEY

Beautiful feature: Coneflowers add beauty for many months in the garden.

from seeds, which ripen in the late summer to fall. The seeds do require cool, dark, moist conditions for a time. This is called stratification. The seeds can be sowed and sown in the spring. They can also be divided in the spring or fall, or root cuttings can be taken in the winter.

The flowerheads of "Magnus" can be well over 6 inches in size. In "White Lustre" the greenish white ray flowers hang down from a brassy cone.

There are several plants that are wonderful companions of coneflowers. Pair it with black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), goldenrod (*Solidago spp.*) and yellow coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*). A pale purple coneflower (*E. pallida*) is more elegant and grows well in a sunny spot. It grows 3 feet tall. The petal-like ray flowers are narrower than purple coneflower and a bit longer in their droop.

The following information is contained in *Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs*, first published in 1987: Echinacea was one of this

country's plant drugs during the 1920s. Native Americans used it as a remedy more than any other plant in the Plains states. The roots are the source of the medicinal properties. Indians used it for snakebite and bites of other poisonous insects; the juice of the plant to bathe burns. Some Indians used the juice to make their hands, feet and mouths insensitive to heat in order to hold, walk on or "swallow" hot coals and fire during ceremonies.

In folk medicine, the juice was used as a blood purifier to cure a wide variety of ailments such as rheumatism, streptococcus infection, bee stings, poisonous snakebites, dyspepsia, tumors and other ailments.

Many herbalists regard echinacea as one of the very best blood purifiers, as well as an effective antibiotic.

GOOD GARDEN TIP

There's a great opportunity for all gardeners and would-be gardeners to participate in a worthwhile project in downtown Birmingham.

A group of dedicated people has been caring for the gardens at the historic Allon House at Southfield and Maple roads. This facility officially opened as the Birmingham Historical Museum on Memorial Day last year.

The goal is to restore the original gardens back to their previous glory. This won't be accomplished in one year, but will take several years to achieve. Therefore, many hands are needed.

This is an excellent way to meet fellow gardeners and make new friends. The first spring cleanup will be 8 a.m. this Saturday, May 4. Please call Barbara Button at (248) 258-1695 for further information.

Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone. Her fax number is (248) 644-1314.

GARDENING CALENDAR

Send items for Gardening Calendar to "Gardening Calendar" Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009, or fax (248) 644-1314.

S.E.M. BROMELIAD SOCIETY
The S.E.M. Bromeliad Society meets at the MSU's Tollgate Environmental Education Center, 28115 Meadowbrook Road (just north of 12 Mile Rd.), Novi, at 2 p.m. Saturday, May 18. Topic: Overwintering Your Bromeliads. A bromeliad

tures are given by various garden experts, no reservations necessary.

METROPOLITAN ROSE SOCIETY
The next meeting of the Metropolitan Rose Society is at 7:15 p.m. Friday, May 3, at the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center, 3600 Marais, east of Crooks and north of 13 Mile Road. The guest speaker is Tom Taylor, noted rosarian and rose judge. His presentation will be on hybridizing roses. Admission is free, and the public is invited. For questions, (248)689-9529.

B'HAM HISTORICAL MUSEUM
The annual spring cleaning at the Birmingham Historical Museum (Allen House) is 9 a.m. Saturday, May 4. Please bring your own tools for working in the garden. Master Gardener hours provided. Further information, call Barb, (248)258-1695.

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This ad was adapted from the Rouge River Watershed Council and is part of the Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project.