



SUSTAINABLE HOLLY

PLANT OF
THE MONTH

SUNFLOWER

SEPTEMBER 2021

SUNFLOWER

Helianthus annuus

Sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*) are beautiful, edible flowers that can grow well in any garden. Sunflowers just like their name suggest, brighten up the day with their large striking flowers and they also attract pollinators to your garden. Sunflowers have a lot of beneficial relationships and within the garden and are on my must grow list every year.

How to grow

Sunflowers like a full sun location. They will turn their head to follow the sun during the day! Sunflowers grow well in most soil but do prefer fertile, free-draining soil.

Plant seeds directly in the soil during spring and summer after the last frost. Plant 30cm apart. Sow seeds in trays indoors first to speed up germination if you are planting late in the season.

Climate

Sunflowers grow best in Spring and Summer. Full sun, sheltered location.

Varieties

'Mammoth Russian' - Large single yellow flowers. 2-4m tall. Edible seeds.

'Prado Red' - Rich red colour. Multiple flowers up to 10 per stem. 1.5m tall.

'Van Goghs Landscape' - Large single traditional yellow flower. 1.5m tall.

'Double Dazzler' - Semi-double single stem flower with tightly packed petals. Edible petals and seeds. 2m tall.

'Evening Sun' - Striking multi head sunflower. Colours range from red, bronze and yellow.

'Italian White' - Pale yellow multi head flowers. 1.5m tall. Great cut flowers.

'Moonwalker' - 'Moonwalker' - Pale yellow multi head flowers. 2m tall. Bushy plant great for screening.

'Teddy Bear' - Fluffy deep gold double flowers. Multi-stems per plant. Dwarf 50cm tall. Great for pots.

'Dwarf Sunstation' - Compact plant with golden yellow flowers. Multi-stems per plant. 45cm tall. Great for pots.

Pests

Mice and rats love the sunflower seeds so be aware and if you have an issue with this it may be best to start the seeds off inside until they are seedlings. Slugs and snails may be an issue when the plants are young.

As the sunflowers mature there will be less pests until they flower and attract birds. If you plant plenty there may be enough for you and the local birds to enjoy!

Care / maintenance

Keep the plants well-watered on warm days. Feed with liquid Seaweed fertilizer or compost tea every few weeks.

Plants with multiple flowers on each stem can be "dead headed" (cut old flowers off) to promote more flowers to form.

The large single flowering varieties such as the 'Mammoth' may need staking to help keep them upright especially with wind or rain.



Harvesting

Harvesting will depend on the variety of Sunflower you have chosen. Read the packet or label to determine the type and length of harvest.

Multi-stem flowers can be picked as they flower to promote more growth. Large single head flowers will be ready to pick as their petals open.

Leave flowers longer on the plant if you want to harvest the seeds (but before the birds do). Use a sharp pair of secateurs to cut the stems.

Reproduce

The seeds will form in the centre of the flower. Pick as the petals fall and seeds are fully formed. Hang it upside down somewhere warm and dry (away from any birds, rats or mice). Once it is completely dry, remove the seeds and place on a tray to dry further. Then keep them in a cool, dry, dark space.

Cooking

Sunflower seeds can be dried and kept in a jar to use in cooking by roasting the seeds. The seeds can also be pressed using specialty equipment to make vegetable oil.

The petals can be used fresh in salads or baking as garnish. The petals can also be used to make natural dyes. The sunflower leaves can be used as you would spinach. The younger leaves are best. The young stems can also be used fresh or cooked.

Preserving your harvest

Sunflower petals can be preserved by pressing or drying and keeping in an airtight container. These can then be used to add bright colourful edible flowers to any meal throughout the year. Sunflower seeds can be dried and kept in a jar to use in cooking by roasting the seeds.

BEST OF SUNFLOWERS

- Low maintenance
- Drought tolerant
- Pest resistant
- Attract Pollinators
- Create diversity in the garden
- Add colour to your garden
- Edible flowers, seeds, stalks & leaves
- Add nutrients to your meals
- Aid in soil regeneration
- Bird or animal feed (seeds)
- Make vegetable oil
- Natural plant dyes
- Act as a trellis to grow vines up
- Green manure