



Planting a sunflower, garden or field?

Here are a few of our favorite tips for planting, nurturing and harvesting beautiful blooms. Happy Growing!

GARDEN/FIELD

PREPARING

A week or two before planting the seeds in your garden, place the sunflower seeds between two pieces of damp paper towels to start germination. Place the damp paper towels with the sunflower seeds on their own for a couple of days and check on their progress from time to time. The seeds that have started to grow are ready to be planted.

Sunflower planting can begin anytime after soils have warmed to 50 degrees F.

PLANTING/GROWING

Till compost or manure into the planting bed to a depth of about 2 to 3 feet. Your soil will have to be loose enough for the water to be able to drain but still firm enough so that the fully grown sunflower will not tip as it sways in the wind.



Wide rows are preferable to allow cultivating for weeks, or to use a row crop header. To plant in rows, space seeds about 6 inches apart in a shallow trench between 1 and 2 inches deep. In sandy soil, 2 inches deep is better. Cover and keep watered until seeds sprout in 7 to 10 days.

Sunflowers are remarkably tough and will grow in any kind of soil as long as it is not waterlogged, preferring soils slightly acidic to somewhat alkaline (pH 6.0 to 7.5).

The roots of the sunflower plant spread widely and can withstand some drought. However, it is best to water them regularly during their most important growth period which is about 20 days before and after flowering. You can encourage root growth with deep, regular watering, especially benefiting taller sunflower varieties sporting top-heavy blooms. They do not need a lot of fertilizer, but ask your gardening professional to recommend a good one to use.

As the name implies, sunshine is very important to your flower. It is important that the planting location receive at least 6 to 8 hours of sun a day.

Plant a new row every 2 to 3 weeks if you want to enjoy continuous blooms. Quit when the first frost arrives.

HARVESTING

With the appearance of the first true leaves (the second set of leaves), thin plants to about 2 feet apart. Depending on the variety, sunflowers will mature and develop seeds in 80 to 120 days.

Sunflower seeds are generally mature when the back of the flower head is yellow. When the head turns brown on the back, seeds are usually ready for harvest.

Although a few sunflower varieties will not need to be staked, it is a good idea to support plants that grow over 3 feet (1 meter) tall or are multi-branched. Loosely tie the plants to stakes with lengths of cloth or other soft material that is available.

If you want to protect your plants from sunflower-loving deer (they love the top of the tender plants), create a 36 inch (7.5 cm) chicken wire barrier supported by six-foot (1.8 meter) bamboo stakes. That should keep them at bay. Simply raise the wire as the plants grow.

When you want to harvest the seeds, cut off the seed heads with a foot or so of the stem still attached, and hang them in a well ventilated but warm, dry place and protect them from rodents and bugs. After drying, dislodge them by rubbing the two heads together, or with your hands, or a stiff brush. Allow the seeds to dry for a few more days then store in airtight glass jars. Keep in the refrigerator to retain flavor.

SUNFLOWERS IN A POT

It's true that sunflowers love the outdoors. But, if you want to brighten your kitchen, living room or office space, you can plant in a pot.

Buy only dwarf seeds for planting in a pot. Ready pot by making sure it's sterilized. Add pebbles at the bottom, then good soil and moisten. Plant seeds. Water every 2 to 3 days, or more often than you would other potted plants. Seeds should germinate in the next 3 to 8 days. Keep watering as before until the plant is 12 inches (30 cm) tall, at which time you should double the watering. Then place in a sunny area of your home, and in two weeks the flowers should be a decent size. Give them 2.5 oz of water. The buds should be showing. In one month, increase water to 3.3 oz. If the flower becomes top heavy, stake it. Enjoy!