



Sunflower Planting Guide

About Sunflowers

Sunflowers hold a magical place in our gardens and in our hearts. Hardly a summer can pass without seeing their cheerful faces gracing gardens, meadows and even highway stretches. Sunflowers have chosen us to be the recipient of their beauty and ease as they are considered the most cheery of annuals and are perhaps the easiest to grow. We gladly accept this invitation each spring as we plunge their large, pregnant seeds into our soil and await their grand entrance.

When & Where to Plant

It is recommended to sow your sunflower seeds directly into your garden rather than start them in starter pots. Sunflowers send down long taproots that can be stunted in small pots, and can be especially harmful if we forget to transplant out into the garden in a timely manner (which, if we are honest, we all have done). We have had the most success directly sowing our seeds and then thinning out if need be.

Sunflowers grow best in full-sun locations that are sheltered from strong winds – receiving at least 6 to 8 hours of full sun exposure per day. Once you have chosen your location, dig down to a depth of 2 inches and turn the soil over to loosen it. Though sunflowers are not finicky, they do appreciate loose, well-draining soil.

How to Plant

Many seeds, like poppies, need sun to germinate. This is not the case with sunflowers and in fact need to be pressed 1 inch deep into the soil. If left on the soil surface, more than likely birds will come and eat them before they ever get anywhere close to germination. Once all danger of frost has passed and both daytime and nighttime temperatures reach 55F to 60F you are ready to sow your sunflower seeds.

Final spacing should be 36" apart for giant sunflowers, 24' apart for regular-sized and 12" apart for miniature varieties.

Possible Problems

Sunflowers are usually problem-free. Plant early enough so that autumn frosts do not cut your sunflowers' life cycle short. Too much rainfall before and after germination can cause the seeds to rot or bring on downy mildew. Be sure to seed after the rainy season to avoid this.

If you would like to harvest the seeds to either replant next year, wait until the end of the bloom cycle. Sunflowers blooms often last 30-45 days. Toward the end of this period, the green back of the flower head will begin to turn yellow and will usually droop at this time. You will also see the seeds swelling on the face of the sunflower. Cover the flowers with paper bags to protect them from birds. Cut off the flower heads and leave inside the brown paper bag. Store this bag in a well-ventilated place like a garage until fully dry. Rub along the seeds with the palm of your hand and the seeds should fall right out into your bag, or work over a cookie sheet. Store seeds in a cool, dry environment until you are ready to reseed next year.