



Sunflowers in Your Garden

University of California Cooperative Extension
Stanislaus County



Sunflowers are a bright and cheerful addition to any garden. They are native to North and Central America and so can be grown easily in your landscape. Sunflowers can be grown for cut flowers, for seed or for edible roots. This publication will describe how to grow and harvest sunflowers in your garden.

SUNFLOWER TYPES

Sunflowers can be annual (live for just one year) or perennial (live for several years). Giant sunflowers can be 10-15' tall, while shorter sunflowers are only 3 feet tall. Tuberous sunflowers, known as "Jerusalem artichokes" or "sunchokes" are planted from tubers in early spring.

REQUIREMENTS

Plant sunflowers in a location where they will receive at least 6-8 hours of sun. All types need regular water until established. Soak the soil thoroughly, then allow it to dry somewhat before reapplying more water. Keep the soil free of weeds to reduce competition.

SOIL PREPARATION

To prepare the soil, add 3-4" of compost and till it into the ground. If you want to add fertilizer, use a product with numbers like 5-10-5, 4-12-4, or similar.

PLANTING

Seeds

Plant seeds one inch deep. For varieties that are 2-5' tall, leave about 6" between them. Space taller sunflowers at least 1' apart, and giant sunflowers 2' apart.

Tubers

The flowers are attractive and can grow up to 6' tall. However, once planted it's nearly impossible to get rid of this tuberous root. Make sure you have a way to keep them contained in a border or boundary.

Tubers found in the grocery aisle are most likely not named by variety. Sunchokes may be difficult to find in Stanislaus county. Call a few grocery stores and nurseries and ask if they are available or can be special ordered.

If they can't be found locally, try ordering them from Moose Tubers (207) 873-7333 or <http://www.fedcoseeds.com/moose.htm>. Their discount deadline is in February.

Plant the tubers 4-5" deep and 10-18" apart. You won't need more than 4 or 5 tubers to get a crop growing. A piece of tuber with 2-3 prominent buds can yield up to 5 pounds of tubers.

SUNOWERS FOR CUT FLOWERS

There are numerous varieties of sunflowers that can be planted in the garden. The guide on page 3 gives a more accurate description of each type. Cut sunflowers in the early morning with pruning shears or a sharp knife. Bring a bucket of lukewarm water out with you and plunge each stalk you cut into it.

Here are two vase solutions to keep flowers looking their best.

Lemon-Lime Soda Mixture

- 1 part lemon-lime soda (not diet)
- 1/4 teaspoon of household bleach
- 3 parts warm water

Lemon Juice Mixture

- 2 tablespoons lemon juice (fresh or bottled)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon of household bleach
- 1 quart warm water

SUNFLOWERS FOR SEED

Choose varieties like those listed on page 3. Most seed packet descriptions will tell you if the sunflower is used for edible seeds.

As sunflower plants get tall, they may need staking. Tie several stalks together gently.

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To discourage birds and squirrels from eating much of your crop, you can lightly tie paper bags over the heads while they are drying.

When seeds look plump and the back of the sunflower head is dry and the flower petals have dropped, it's time to harvest the seeds. Cut the flower off, leaving about 1 foot of stalk. Place a cloth or paper bag over the head to catch the seeds while they dry. When the seed head is thoroughly dry, remove them by rubbing two flower heads together. You may want to do this over a bucket topped with a 1/2" screen to separate the chaff from the seeds. Let the seeds dry for 1-2 months

Store seeds in an airtight container in the refrigerator and they will last for several months.

Sunflower seeds can be prepared plain or salty. For plain sunflower seeds, toast at 300° F for 15-25 minutes.

For salted seeds, the process takes a little longer. Soak seeds overnight in a mixture of 2 tablespoons of salt to 1 cup water. Then, boil for a few minutes and drain. Spread seeds thinly on a baking sheet and toast at 200° F for 3 hours.

SUNFLOWERS FOR TUBERS

Dig up tubers when the plant leaves turn yellow in fall. Cut the top off the plant if you wish to leave some of the

sunchokes in the ground for later harvest before winter rains.

Tubers are easy to dig up with a pitchfork, but be careful not to injure the delicate skin. Injured tubers should be eaten first, as they will not last very long. Rebury any tubers that are too small to eat. Don't worry about digging them all up. There are plenty you won't be able to find, and they will resprout in spring.

When exposed to air, tubers shrivel up quickly and will decay in a few weeks. Store sunchoke tubers in a cool, dry place and they will last longer. Do not rinse with water until you are ready to use them.

COOKING WITH TUBERS

Rinse dirt off tubers gently using lukewarm water. They can be used fresh in salads or cooked. You can peel them or leave the peel on.

Master Gardeners in San Mateo/San Francisco County have a neat website about growing Sunchokes. http://groups.ucanr.org/sanmateo/Growing_Jerusalem_Artichokes/

Sunchoke Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. sunchokes
- 1 large shallot, diced
- 4 tbs butter
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- salt and pepper

Directions:
Scrub and peel off blemishes on sunchokes, then slice into 1" pieces. Melt butter in large pot and add shallot. Sauté until translucent. Add sunchokes, thyme, a salt and black pepper. Cook for 5 minutes. Stir frequently.

Add chicken stock and bay leaf. Bring to a boil and immediately reduce heat to a low simmer. Cover and cook for 20-30 minutes, until sunchokes are easily pierced with a fork. Remove bay leaf. Allow mixture to cool. Then puree in batches using a blender, blending until smooth.

Return soup to pot and add cream. Adjust salt and pepper to taste.

Sunchokes have a tendency to cause flatulence in some people. Try eating a small amount to see how you feel. Bon appétit!



Sunflower Variety Guide

| Name | Variety | Purpose | Description |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------|---|
| Common Sunflowers <i>Helianthus annuus</i> | ‘Bright Bandler’ | Cut Flower | This plant reaches 5-7’ tall with yellow and mahogany flowers. The flowers are bred for reduced pollen shed. |
| | ‘Lemon Éclair’ | Cut Flower | This plant is 4-6’ tall and has light yellow flowers. |
| | ‘Prado Red’ | Cut Flower | This plant is 3 1/2-4’ tall and has deep red flowers. The flowers are bred for reduced pollen shed. |
| | ‘Teddy Bear’ | Cut Flower | This plant is shorter than most sunflower types at only 1 1/2’ tall. It has double yellow flowers that are 6” wide and resemble pom-poms. |
| | ‘Velvet Queen’ | Cut Flower | This plant is 6-8’ tall and the flower color is a combination of bronze, burgundy, dark brown and mahogany. |
| | | | |
| Common Sunflowers <i>Helianthus annuus</i> | ‘Russian Giant’ & ‘Mammoth Russian’ | Edible Seeds | These plants grow to at least 10’ tall, and sometimes as tall as 15.’ They usually have one big flower head that is about 1’ across. |
| | ‘Kong’ | Edible Seeds | This plant can reach 10’ tall or higher with heads that are 1’ across. |
| | ‘Sunspot’ | Edible Seeds | This plant reaches 2’ tall and has 10” flower heads. |
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| Jerusalem Artichoke <i>Helianthus tuberosus</i> | ‘Clearwater’ | Edible Tubers | Smooth tubers are white inside with a crispy flesh. |
| | ‘Nakhodka’ | Edible Tubers | White flesh with lots of buds. |
| | ‘Waldspinel’ | Edible Tubers | Red flesh tuber that is very knobby. Color fades with cooking. |

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Recipe taken from:
<http://houndstoothgourmet.com/puree-of-sunchoke-soup/>

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