**How to Grow Sunflowers**

*Helianthus annuus*, the common sunflower, is native across North America. There are many reasons to grow sunflowers—they are beautiful and make cheerful fresh-cut flowers, are easy to grow, drought tolerant, fun for kids, attract bees and birds, they condition the soil, and the seeds are a nutritious snack.

**Sunflowers Are Easy to Grow**
- Plant in full sun, at least 6 hours a day.
- Any kind of soil is fine as long as it is not waterlogged.
- Best to plant directly in the ground after all danger of spring frost.
- Follow directions on the seed packet for spacing.
- Keep soil moist until seeds sprout in approximately 11 days.
- Plant more seeds every 2 to 3 weeks to enjoy continuous bloom.
- Sunflower plants emit substances that inhibit the growth of certain other plants. Separate them from potatoes and pole beans.
- When the plant is established, water deeply though infrequently to encourage deep rooting. Unless the weather is exceptionally wet or dry, water once a week with several gallons of water.
- If you have good soil, sunflowers do not require fertilizing.
- When plants are growing well, apply a 2 to 3 inch mulch layer—keep it away from the stems.
- Stake sunflowers that grow over 3 feet tall or are multi-branched.
- Sunflowers will mature and develop seeds in 80 to 120 days.

**Sunflowers Usually Have Very Few Problems**
They are sometimes infected with fungal diseases such as downy mildew or rust.
A small gray sunflower moth sometimes lays its eggs in developing sunflower blossoms.
Go to the UC Statewide Integrated Pest Management website for more information—ipm.ucanr.edu

**Harvesting Sunflowers**
Cut sunflowers should be harvested in the morning; if you wait until afternoon, they may wilt.

**Seed Harvest Tips**
- In early fall check for signs of maturity. The reverse side turns from green to yellow then brown.
- Large heads nod downward, tiny petals covering developing seeds are dry and fall out easily, exposing tightly-packed mature seeds.
- To protect the seeds from predators, cover the flower heads with a paper bag or cloth.
- Cut off seed heads with a foot or more of stem attached; hang in a warm, dry, well-ventilated place.
- Let them cure for several weeks, then dislodge the seeds and allow them to dry for 1-2 months.
- Store in airtight glass jars in the refrigerator.
- Or cut the seed heads off and hang them outside, or simply place them on the ground and enjoy watching the squirrels and birds harvest the seeds.

**A good resource is the National Sunflower Association, sunflowernsa.com**

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