

Kentucky Garden Flowers

Sunflowers

Robert Anderson, Extension Floriculture Specialist

Sunflowers received renewed interest in the 1990s in home decoration and home gardens. American consumers prefer large daisy-like flowers and sunflower is the epitome of large daisy-like flowers. The number of sunflower varieties has tripled in the last 15 years due to increased garden interest.

Most gardeners are not aware of the many perennial sunflowers that are native or can be grown in Kentucky. Most are quite large for residential landscapes, but all would be great additions to wildflower meadows on small farms across the state.

Sunflower – *Helianthus*

Flower Color	Height	Season	Pests	Uses	Propagation
orange-yellow	2' - 10'	summer	leaf spot, powdery mildew	background, containers, wildflower meadows	seeds

***Helianthus angustifolius* – Swamp Sunflower** – Swamp sunflower is a native Kentucky wildflower that is a reliable perennial in Kentucky gardens. It is somewhat tall for many landscapes; the native species and ‘Gold Lace’ performed well in trials at the UK Horticulture Research Farm from 1993-1996.

***Helianthus annuus* – Annual Sunflower** – This is the typical sunflower, recognized by everyone. There are many varieties of the annual sunflower and they grow best in full sun in any type of soil. The traditional types are 6’ to 10’ feet tall with a single large flower on the top of the stem. The foliage is not attractive, so gardeners tend to keep sunflowers along fences or in vegetable gardens. The seeds are edible and are popular for birds. The flowers should not be harvested until the head has turned brown and dry. Newer types of sunflowers are grown just for the flowers. Plants may be 3’ to 6’ tall with a single large flower or with multiple smaller flowers on branches. Sunflower leaves may be quite susceptible to foliar diseases. Many types of annual sunflowers are sold as cut flowers at farmer’s markets across the state in the summer.



Dwarf – ‘Big Smile’, ‘Pacino’, ‘Solita’, ‘Sundance Kid’, ‘Sunny Smile’, ‘Teddy Bear’.

Intermediate – ‘Chianti’, ‘Dorado’, ‘Elite Sun’, ‘Floristan’, ‘Lemon Flair’, ‘Moonshadow’, ‘Prado’ series, ‘Ring of Fire’, ‘Sonja’, ‘Starburst Aura’.

Tall – ‘Claret’, ‘Full Sun’, ‘Soraya’, ‘Sun and Moon’ series, ‘Sundown’, ‘Sunrich’ series.

***Helianthus mollis* – Ashy Sunflower** – Ashy sunflower is a native Kentucky wildflower that is a reliable perennial in Kentucky gardens. It flowers around August 1st each year and produces lemon yellow 3” flowers in a modified spike on top of the stem. The leaves have fuzzy gray hairs on the surface. It is somewhat tall for many landscapes; this species performed well in trials at the UK Horticulture Research Farm from 1990-1996. Ashy sunflower produces large clumps of plants from a vigorous system of underground rhizomes. This plant is probably too invasive for a residential landscape, but would be great in large wildflower meadows.



Helianthus angustifolius ‘Gold Lace’



Helianthus mollis



‘Solita’ from Benary Seed Co.



‘Sunny Smile’ from Takii Seed Co.



‘Ring of Fire’

***Helianthus x multiflorus* – Many-flowered Sunflower** – A perennial sunflower, up to 6' tall, with a spectacular show of flowers. ‘Flore Pleno’, ‘Lodden Gold’, ‘Meteor’, ‘Morning Sun’, ‘Soleil d’Or’.

***Helianthus occidentalis* – Western Sunflower** – Western sunflower is a native Kentucky wildflower that is a reliable perennial in Kentucky gardens. This plant produces small orange-yellow daisy-like flowers, 2” across, from early to mid summer. The plant spreads by underground rhizomes, but does not

seem overly invasive. Western sunflower is more “landscape-size” than other perennial sunflowers. It has performed well in trials at the UK Horticulture Research Farm from 1993-1996.



Helianthus occidentalis

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.