



THE LANDSCAPE CONSULTANTS

Your design and installation team



Growing Super Sunflowers

The sunflower is a member of the Composite family, which is the second largest flowering plant family. Sunflowers are of the genus *Helianthus*, coming from the Greek words *helios* meaning sun and *anthos* meaning flower. The simple but stately beauty of the sunflower becomes more complicated with a closer look. There are two types of flower heads – the ray flowers and the disk flowers. The ray flowers or petals are broad and ring the outer edge of the flower head, which attract nearby insects to the flower center. The center flower, called disk flowers are tubular in shape and require pollen from another sunflower plant to be fertilized. The insects pollinate the flowers that then develop into seeds.

Sunflowers will grow in just about any soil type - where ever the seed falls or the bird flies so to speak. You can have stray seedlings sprout up in some of the strangest places. But this is a testament as to how hardy these plants are; the only thing that they really need is full sun.

The height of the common sunflower ranges from three feet to 12 feet, with some that can reach 18 feet.

Sunflowers are fast, vigorous growers that can reach six feet in four to five month's time. To supply the plant with enough nutrients to yield larger flower heads and meatier seeds, an application of organic fertilizer or compost is recommended when the flower heads begin to appear. Sunflowers thrive in hot, dry weather and will tolerate drought but they will give better seeds if they receive the occasional deep drink.

Harvesting sunflowers heads is a quick and easy task, however you may require a ladder to accomplish the job. You can harvest the flower heads when they are fully mature or when at least 2/3 of the seeds are mature. Keep an eye on the flowers and when the birds start to visit, it's time to protect the flower heads with some cheesecloth. The covered seed heads will be ready to harvest when the backs of the heads are brown and dry and no trace of green remains. Remove the whole seed head with a few feet of stem attached; hang in a well-ventilated location to cure. After curing, when the backs are entirely brown and papery, remove the seed for final storage in air-tight containers in the fridge.

Sunflower seeds are very high in many minerals, vitamins and essential acids. The main nutrients are protein, thiamine, vitamin E, iron, phosphorous, potassium, calcium, and the essential fatty acids linoleic and oleic acid. Sunflowers are in the same protein league as beef and are higher in iron than any other food except egg yolks and liver.