

GROW A SUNFLOWER



Sunflowers have been a symbol around the world of hope and solidarity, so it's fitting they can play a part in our Jubilee Summer of Hope. Growing sunflowers is a great thing to do and an activity loved by children, so be sure to involve them if you can.

Watch it grow in the garden or in a pot, as it climbs up to 2 metres in height, and reflect on the strong, inspirational women who may have influenced you. This is a great activity to do with children and grandchildren. You could give away your sunflower for a donation, or take it one step further and organise a plant sale!

Where to grow sunflowers

Sunflowers need sun. They do best in fertile soil in a sheltered spot, but will also do well in containers. However, if you want your sunflower to grow really tall, it's best to plant it in the ground.

When to plant sunflower seeds

Sow sunflower seeds from April to May, individually in 10cm pots of peat-free, multi-purpose compost. Plant out into the garden when all risk of frost has passed, from early June. If you're confident your garden has already warmed up, you can sow directly into an outdoor pot.

How to start sunflowers in pots before planting out

Sow sunflower seeds into individual pots of peat-free, multi-purpose compost in April. Sow one seed per 7.5cm pot. Push the seed 1.5cm into the compost and water in. Cover pots with a clear plastic bag and place in a cool but bright place.

After the sunflowers have germinated, keep them well-watered until they're ready to plant out at the end of May. Prepare soil by removing weeds and add plenty of organic matter. Plant the sunflowers at the same depth they were in the pot. Water well and stake plants with a bamboo cane or similar.

Caring for sunflowers

Annual sunflowers need plenty of water. Feed them with tomato feed just before flowering. Don't allow plants to dry out as very tall varieties will have a job to recover.

Very tall varieties may need the support of a garden cane – especially when growing in an exposed position.

After flowering, leave the faded flower head intact so the birds can feast on the seeds. Once they have eaten their fill pull out the entire plant and put it on the compost heap.

After flowering, sunflower heads develop masses of sunflower seed. You can harvest these to use in cooking, but bear in mind you will need to remove the tough seed coat before eating. Better still, take the seed and leave them to dry for a few days, before storing in a paper envelope in a dry spot, so you can sow them the following year. Make sure you leave some seeds for the birds, too.

Sources:

 <https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to-grow-plants/how-to-grow-sunflowers/>

 <https://horticulture.co.uk/sunflower/>

