



SUNFLOWERS

Facts about one of the most famous flowers in the world

Name: Common Sunflower

Scientific Name: Helianthus annuus

Location and Habitat: Prairies and dry, open areas

Basic Information:

- Sunflowers are actually "sun followers" through a type of plant behavior called heliotropism. Their buds and blossoms start the day facing east and then follow the sun until it sets in the west. But when the flowers are undergoing seed production, mature flower heads become heavier and stiffer than usual and remain facing east for the rest of the day.
- The sunflower head, which looks like a single flower resembling the sun, is actually made up of smaller flowers. The yellow petals surrounding the head are called "ray florets." Unlike regular flowers, these florets cannot reproduce. But the disk florets, located in the middle of the sunflower head, can produce seeds. They have male and female parts, allowing each disk floret to make seeds and self-pollinate.
- About six to eight hours of sunlight are needed for sunflowers to grow well. As if reaching for the skies, some sunflower plants can grow as tall as 16 feet! Different species grow at varying heights, and the distance between plants in a plot can also influence this.

They have a history of healing

Sunflowers also serve as home remedies in some cultures, like in Mexico, where the blooms are used to soothe chest pain. Some Native American tribes, such as the Cherokee and Dakota, use parts of the plant in their medicinal concoctions for relieving kidney and pulmonary issues.

They have been out of this world

U.S. astronaut Don Pettit brought sunflower seeds to outer space during his 2012 trip to the International Space Station. He planted the seeds and documented his out-of-this-world gardening journey by taking photos of the growing sunflowers and sharing his experience through a blog.