

Sunflowers

(*Helianthus sp.*)

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The genus *Helianthus* is named after Helios, the Greek sun god, who in legend was said to travel in a chariot each day across the sky. Many sunflowers track the sun throughout each day, following Helios' path. Princeton University defines *Helianthus* as any member of the genus having large flower heads with dark disk florets (the flowers at the center of the head) and showy yellow rays (flowers at the outside ring of the head).

(<http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s+helianthus>)

You may recall that the sunflower is indeed made up of a few to hundreds of tiny flowers with the whole flowering head mimicking the appearance of a single large flower.

Helianthus annuus (pictured) is an annual member of the genus with very large and showy flowers, producing the familiar culinary sunflower seeds; a single seed is produced from each flower in the flowering head.

Many cultivars are available, but be aware that any seed produced will most likely revert to the wild form over successive generations. Plants and seeds for the cultivars are generally widely available, and the species will often grow easily from seed.

Finally, the species is native to much of the US and requires little if any supplemental water (making it one of our WaterWise plant choices).

