

# GROW YOUR OWN SUNFLOWER

The common sunflower is native to North America and grows in dry, sunny locations. Bees, butterflies and hummingbirds dine on the nectar and help pollinate the flowers. You have probably eaten a snack of sunflower seeds or watched as songbirds and squirrels enjoy this treat.

You can grow your own sunflower plant in a sunny spot in a garden or even a pot. All you need is sunlight, soil, water and warmth.

Share your project with others on social media using the hashtag #GrowSmart22

## Here's what you need

1. Sunflower seeds
2. Sunny spot (receives 6-8 hours of sunlight per day)
3. In a garden or a container with drainage holes
  - Use a 10-12-inch diameter pot with drainage holes for two-feet tall and shorter sunflowers
  - Use a 3-5 gallon pot for taller sunflower varieties
4. Potting mix
5. Fertilizer
6. Planting and growth chart
  - Make your own or [use this one](https://bit.ly/3yz5xFU) (https://bit.ly/3yz5xFU)
7. Plant tags (optional)

## Getting started

1. Print the "[planting and sunflower growth chart](https://bit.ly/3yz5xFU)" (https://bit.ly/3yz5xFU) or make your own
2. Write down the following information
  - Name of the sunflower you are growing
  - Height your sunflower is supposed to grow
  - Date you planted the seeds
  - Date seeds sprout (green appeared)
  - Measure and record how tall your plant is every week
3. Take photos or draw pictures of your plant throughout the summer

## Growing sunflowers in a pot

1. Buy a plant pot or recycle an item found in your house, garage or pots set out for recycling at your garden center
  - The pot should be 10-12 inches in diameter for two-feet-tall and shorter sunflowers
  - Use a 3-5 gallon pot for taller varieties
2. Add drainage holes to the bottom of the container, if needed
3. Fill the pot with a potting mix
4. Add a granular slow release fertilizer like Milorganite to the potting mix according to the directions on the fertilizer packet. If using a liquid fertilizer, apply after planting the seeds.
5. Plant seeds 1 inch deep and 4-5 inches apart or as recommended on the seed packet



### Growing sunflowers in the ground

1. Locate a sunny spot in a garden in your yard or make a new garden
2. Remove any weeds and loosen the soil
3. Add fertilizer to the soil according to the fertilizer label directions
4. Plant seeds 1 inch deep and 6 inches apart

### Helping seeds grow

1. Whether growing in the ground or a pot, seeds need
  - Moisture and warmth to wake up and start to grow
  - Soil to give the seeds a home and keep them warm and moist
  - Some seeds need light to sprout but not your sunflower seeds
2. Water the soil often enough so it feels damp but is not soggy wet

### Caring for your sunflower

- All plants need sunlight, water, and food (fertilizer/nutrients in the soil) to grow
  - Sunflowers need 6-8 hours of sunshine per day
  - Check soil moisture daily; water thoroughly when top inch of soil is dry
    - As plants grow taller, they grow more roots and need less water
    - Continue to check pots daily; water when top few inches of soil are dry
    - Water plants in the garden every few days or once a week when the top few inches of soil are dry
  - Give them a big drink
    - In containers – water until extra water runs out the pot
    - In the garden – use 5 pints (a bit more than ½ gallon) per square foot for every two feet along the row
- Tall sunflowers with large flowers may need support especially in windy areas
  - Secure a tall bamboo or wooden stake 6 inches in the ground at planting
  - Loosely tie the stem of the sunflower to the stake as it grows

### Watch for visitors to your sunflower

- Sunflowers attract insects, hummingbirds, songbirds and squirrels. Make a list, draw pictures or take photos of visitors to your sunflower

### Harvesting sunflower seeds

- The seeds are ripe and ready to harvest when
  - The back of the flower is yellow like a banana or brown
  - Most of the yellow petals fall off
  - You can easily rub off the fuzzy covering on the seeds
- You may want to protect some of the seeds from hungry birds and squirrels
  - Cover the flower with a paper bag or cheesecloth as soon as seeds start to form
- Remove the flower from the plant as soon as the seeds are ripe
  - Eat the seeds fresh, roast a few of them or use them to feed the birds



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## Doing and Learning More

### You're the engineer (youth with the help of older siblings or adults)

- Create a bird feeder from sunflowers
  1. Remove the flower from the plant when seeds are ripe
  2. Use a screwdriver to punch 4 evenly spaced holes in the flower
  3. Thread twine or yarn through the holes to create the hanger
  4. Hang in the garden and watch the birds that come to visit
- Write down
  - How many days it took for birds to find the feeder and start eating
  - How many birds visited and ate the seeds
  - Look in a book or ask a birdwatcher for help naming the birds
- Draw pictures or take photos of birds eating from your feeder

### You're the engineer (teens and tweens)

- Design and build a bird feeder suitable for sunflower seeds and the birds you want to attract
- Research plans and gather more information online or in books at your library
  - Make a list of needed supplies
  - Calculate the cost and find a source for the materials
  - Build the feeder (enlist an adult's help as needed)
  - Watch for visitors and record the number and type of birds
  - Evaluate success of the design
  - Did you attract birds? Did the squirrels eat the seeds?
  - Make needed adjustments for future bird feeders

### You're the mathematician (youth with the help of older siblings or adults)

- Once the sunflower seeds are ripe look for the spiral pattern of the seeds
  - Look for other spirals in nature (seashells, pinecones and more)
    - This is called the Fibonacci (Golden) Spiral based on a sequence of numbers that artists, mathematicians, and architects use in their work
- Collect (with permission) other items in nature with this spiral
- Draw a picture of the spiral
  - Can you make pictures of things with this spiral?

### You're the mathematician (teens and tweens)

- Find the spiral seed arrangement in the sunflower – the Fibonacci (golden) Spiral
- Research the importance of this number
- How do artists, mathematicians, and architects use this number?
- Try drawing the [Fibonacci Spiral](https://bit.ly/3L7h3e3) (<https://bit.ly/3L7h3e3>), using the link to help guide you

