



Sunflowers

Jayne Grzebik

O'ahu Urban Horticulturist and Master Gardener Coordinator
CTAHR Urban Garden Center at Pearl City

Planting a sunflower garden? You probably know that sunflowers love sun. You probably know that the head of a sunflower moves toward the sun; this is called positive phototropism. Root systems, on the other hand, exhibit negative phototropism, or gravitropism, growing away from the sun and toward the earth.

Sunflowers follow the sun from east to west. As their blossom matures, however, the head of the sunflower settles to face east. We don't exactly know why. We can only presume that they are protecting their precious seeds from the late-day heat and sunscald. As you plant sunflowers to celebrate fall, remember to plant them on the west side of the house so that they face you and not your neighbor when they mature.

Visiting your local nursery, you'll find sunflower seeds to purchase. There are over 60 cultivars of this fall favorite. You can choose a packet containing a single cultivar, like 'Mammoth', which will produce sunflowers of giant size. Or you can choose a mixed-seed packet—it's fun to see the many colors and sizes of different varieties.

To begin, it is best to germinate the seeds first. Fold a paper towel once and then again, mist with water, and place it on a plate. Place the sunflower seeds onto the paper towel about ½ inch apart from each other. Cover

the seeds with another damp paper towel that is folded twice. Mist the top layer with water every other morning. In a week or two, you should see some of the seeds start to sprout. Pick the ones with a green sprout, place them into the ground ¼ inch deep, and cover them with soil. It is a good idea to add compost to the soil before planting.

There are two types of sunflower seeds. Small black sunflower seeds are primarily used to make sunflower oil or meal for cooking. The black sunflower seeds are also the seed of choice in most bird feeders. Sunflower oil is very high in Vitamin E, an important antioxidant. Non-oil seed is black and white striped and are used to eat out of the shell or roast in the shell. Sunflower seeds are ready for harvesting when the back of the sunflower head turns brown.

Do you have a gardening question?

Contact a CTAHR Cooperative Extension Service or Master Gardener program resource.

East Hawai'i: (9 a.m.–noon, Tu, Th) 981-5199, himga@hawaii.edu

Kaua'i: (1–4:30 p.m., M–F) 274-3475, rebesu@hawaii.edu

Maui: (9 a.m.–noon, M, Tu, Th) 244-3242 ext. 228, MauiMG@ctahr.hawaii.edu

Moloka'i: (9 a.m.–noon, M–F) 567-6935, arcer@ctahr.hawaii.edu

O'ahu: (9 a.m.–noon, M–F) 453-6055, OahuMG@ctahr.hawaii.edu

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