

MOLES SEEDS

Sunflower

Cultural Leaflet: ZZ350

Sunflowers (*Helianthus*) are a popular plant, with people loving the cheerfulness they offer in a container or border, or as a cut flower. The traditional yellow with a dark centre is still the most popular but there are now many different colours and varieties to try.

Moles offer those best suited as pot plant varieties and also the taller cut flower and border types, both of which are available pollen-free so they have a longer flower life and no mess compared to standard varieties.

Sunflowers have a variable habit depending upon the density at which they are grown, and the same varieties grown in different locations can be unrecognisable as being the same variety. High density production of the dwarf varieties results in relatively compact plants, but if the same variety is sown straight into the soil, in an open space, it can produce a much larger and bushier plant.

Pot sunflowers are a quick and straightforward crop to produce, for Spring and Summer pot bedding sales. Sell with main bud in flower and the lateral buds developing.

For a cut flower crop, sow direct outside, but they can also be grown at high densities in glasshouses/polytunnels. Although all our cut flower varieties are suitable, we would especially recommend the pollenless ones as not only will the others will shed pollen when cut, but they are longer lasting in a vase.

Variety Selection

Pot Plant Varieties

Pacino is probably the market leading variety, originally golden yellow-flowered, now joined by lemon, and golden with dark centre. Several flowers can be open on one plant if required. Big Smile is very fast into flower, approx 50 days from sowing. Teddy Bear takes longer to flower but produces dense double flowers. Both Munchkin and Junior are pollen-free types, resulting in longer lasting flowers, and no pollen fall in the customer's house. Junior excelled in trials, offering good uniformity.

Cut Flower Varieties

Superted is a new fully double, pollen-free variety that produces bright yellow flowers. Suitable for greenhouse or outdoor production, it is an outstanding cut flower with good vase life. The Sunrich series are non-branching, high quality F1 hybrids, producing long-lasting flowers. The F1 Vincent series have been developed to offer more and wider petals, with very good flower presentation - they also have a short crop cycle, flowering approx 70 days after sowing. We advise sowing a range of types, to see which suit your particular conditions/market.

Programming

Sow pot plant varieties March to June. Sowing to first flower takes around 7-10 weeks depending on the variety.

Sow cut flower varieties mid April to mid June, for flowering plants around 10 weeks later at peak season (12-14 weeks for earliest outdoor sowings).

Propagation and Growing on

Pot Plant Varieties

Sow the seeds directly into a 10-15cm pot (or into a large-celled plug tray first if preferred, to save on glasshouse space in the early stages – sow on surface and cover with vermiculite, transplanting 2-3 weeks later). Choose a free-draining, open, seed sowing compost, which should be thoroughly wetted with a suitable fungicide prior to sowing (to prevent damping-off diseases), and the trays allowed to drain. Cover the seeds with vermiculite, and cover trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible. Germination takes around 4-6 days at 18-20°C – maintain this temperature right throughout the cropping period if possible.

Plants grow rapidly, so a liquid feed is advisable at every watering. Plants will be ready for sale with the main terminal bud in flower, and the lateral buds just developing.

Cut Flower Varieties

Protected Cropping

Direct sow into the soil, at around 1cm deep, or sow into large-celled plug trays first and transplant from those. Germinate at 18-20°C, this should take around 5-7 days in the plug tray, 10 days if direct sown. Plant through Chrysanthemum netting to give the plants support, and ensure that adequate water is available in the early stages. As plants establish and grow away, it is possible to reduce the watering, and do not over-feed, as this will result in excessive growth. Use a spacing of around 12cm for the pollen-free types, double this for the traditional branching varieties.

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Outdoor Cropping

Sunflowers can be grown as an outdoor crop direct sown after the last frosts. Sow 2-3cm deep, germination should be 2-3 weeks depending on temperature, and subsequent crop growth should be very fast. Plants are sturdy enough not to require any support, except in the most exposed locations. Drill in rows approximately 30cm apart in beds, allowing space for access to cut the flowers. Cut the flowers just before the first ray petals open. Treatment of the stems with a holding solution can preserve vase life.

Pest and Disease

Maintain good air movement through the crop, and water in the morning rather than the evening to keep the foliage dry and lessen attack by Botrytis.

Pay good attention to glasshouse hygiene, using only fresh trays, water and clean soil to avoid damping-off diseases. Do not over-water the crop, or Pythium root rot may result.

Check for the presence of pests such as aphids, whitefly, thrips and caterpillars, spraying accordingly. Monitor the crop for foliar diseases such as Powdery and Downy Mildew. Rust and leaf spot can be a problem, but this is unlikely in such a fast-growing crop, if favourable conditions for growth are maintained. Follow manufacturers' guidelines with all chemical treatments.

Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.

(06/19)