

### Cultural Details: **Sunflower for pot production**

Sunflowers (*Helianthus*) 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 the same variety. High density production of the dwarf varieties covered by this leaflet results in relatively compact pot plants, but if the same variety is sown straight into the soil, it can produce a large bushy plant, around 1.5 metres in height.

Pot sunflowers are a quick and straightforward crop to produce, for Spring and Summer pot bedding sales.

### **Variety Selection**

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. Sunspot tends to produce a single, large flower in the pot. Teddy Bear produces dense double flowers, and takes slightly longer to flower. Munchkin is a pollen-free type, resulting in longer lasting flowers, and no pollen fall in the customer's house.

### **Programming**

Sow March, April and May, sowing to first flower takes around 7-10 weeks depending on the variety.

### **Propagation and Growing on**

Culture is very straightforward. Sow the seeds directly into a 12-15cm 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.

### **Growth Regulators**

Growth regulators can be used on Pot Sunflower varieties (according to the manufacturers' guidelines), to ensure a compact habit for pot work.

### **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.*