

SUNFLOWER

Sunflowers have a long tradition of being grown for food. Early Native Americans were among the first to grow sunflowers as a food source and with good reason. Sunflowers are a source all sorts of healthy fats, fiber and vitamin E. Not to mention that they just taste great.

If you have decided to try growing sunflowers as food, there are a few things that you should keep in mind.

Choose the right kind when growing sunflowers for food

First, you need to choose the right kind of sunflower to grow. While there are now dozens of varieties of sunflowers to choose from, you should find one that is a confectionary sunflower seed or a non-oil seed. These tend to be the large black and white striped seeds. These are the tastiest seeds for human consumption. Some examples of confectionary sunflower seeds are Russian Mammoth, Paul Bunyan Hybrid, Miriam and Tarahumara.

Choose the right spot when planting sunflowers for food

Next you need to select a good place to grow your sunflowers. Sunflowers need plenty of sunlight, so make sure that the site you choose get at least 6-8 hours of sunlight a day.

You also want to make sure that the place you choose has good drainage, but also has a soil structure that will retain some water and sunflowers need lots of water.

Sunflowers need lots of fertilizer

Sunflowers are also heavy feeders. Make sure the ground that you plant your sunflowers in has plenty of nutrients to support the sunflowers. If you are not sure that the place you have chosen has enough nutrients, amend the soil with compost, well-composted manure or fertilizer. Also be aware that the sunflowers will deplete the soil they grow in. If you plan on growing anything else in that location (especially if you are growing the sunflowers in your vegetable garden), you will need to amend the soil after you have harvested your sunflowers.

How to plant sunflowers for food

Plant your sunflower seeds directly into the ground right after the last frost date of your area. Be sure to keep the area weed free until the sunflower grows tall enough to reach above any possible surrounding weeds. Letting weeds grow around seedling sunflowers could block the much needed sunlight from the sunflower seedlings.

Your sunflower seeds will be ready to harvest when the head turns down towards the ground. If you wish to double check that your sunflower seeds are ready, simply remove one seed from the head and crack it open. The kernel inside should be plump and fill the whole shell.

When your sunflower gets near to being ready to harvest, you may also wish to protect the head from bird and other animals that also find sunflower seeds tasty. To do this, cover the seed head in mesh or netting.