



Trowel Talk!

August, 2015

Sunflowers rise to the occasion

The annual sunflower or *Helianthus* is statuesque and beloved, edible and ornamental. Children of all ages are captivated by their huge centres and brightly radiating petals. The painter, Van Gogh, was inspired by their intensity of colour. Van Gogh's work lives on, in part, because of his exceptional rendering of these brash beauties.

Helianthus is a member of the daisy family and native to the Americas, where its use as food can be traced back to 3000BC. The Incas used it in religious rites, and eventually Spanish explorers carried seed back to Europe where the sunflower became established as both an ornamental and a food crop.



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Helianthus annuus 'Ring of Fire' (or annual sunflower) reaches for the sky

Helianthus cultivars suffer from few pests and accept average soil. Heat and drought tolerant, they bloom in late summer and

early fall, bringing additional brilliance to the autumn landscape. You can plant seeds directly outdoors after the last frost day, or you can start them three or four weeks earlier indoors in peat pots. Either way, eventually you will want to have them growing at least 30cm apart.



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

A patch of teddybear sunflowers add a cheery punch of colour in the perennial garden.

Today's sunflowers are available in many heights. 'Kong' can often manage 4.5m. 'Teddybear' is a dwarf at 60cm. Blossoms can be single, semi-double or double, and there are both annual and perennial varieties. Their combination of colours ranges from subtle creamy white through to vibrant reds and oranges.

H. giganteus is extra tall, at 3 to 4m, with dinner-plate sized blossoms. 'Mammoth Russian' grows quickly to 4.5m and is ready to use in 80 days. Sunflower giants make interesting screens or backgrounds, especially when teamed with under plantings of marigolds, marguerites or nasturtiums. Locate them where their heads will face toward your favourite garden seat as they follow the sun.

Perhaps you might try some of the pollen free cultivars such as 'Moon Shadow', 'Indian Blanket' and 'Firecracker'. These multi-branched varieties, in shades from delicate to flaming, all make stunning cut flowers.

Standard sunflowers 'Italian White', a heritage variety, and 'Tall Sungold' range from 1 to 1.3m and have branching forms that respond well to regular dead-heading. Colours for these medium sized *Helianthus* varieties include rich shades of yellow, purple, red-brown, orange and numerous combinations thereof. These too are superb as cut flowers that last well.

Perennial sunflowers grow 1.2 to 2m with flowers 4 to 7cm in diameter. Their blossoms are usually a golden yellow in colour. Choices include several cultivars of *H. decapetalus* - 'Maximus', 'Loddon Gold', 'Triomphe de Gand' and 'Soleil d'Or'. Since they can be aggressive, locate them where you can let them spread or be prepared to divide them every three or four years. This is especially true for the edible *H. tuberosa*, Jerusalem artichoke (aka 'sunchokes'), whose tubers provide a tasty, nourishing substitute for potatoes.



The edible, tuberous root of *Helianthus tuberosa* is shown above

Annual or perennial, tall or small - these bright extraverts with their lengthy history, continue to nourish body and soul in a relatively undemanding fashion. We can certainly appreciate Van Gogh's great admiration for these impressive flowers.

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Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton

Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily

- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

Ottawa Farmers Market, Lansdowne Park: Sundays, July to Sept, 9am-1pm

Main Farmers Market, Museum of Nature: Saturdays, Aug 22, Sept 5, 10am-2pm

Cumberland Market: Saturday, Sept 5, 9am-1pm

North Gower Farmers Market, 2403 Roger Stevens Dr, North Gower: Saturday, Sept 19, 8:30am-1:00pm

Richmond Fair, Sept 17-20

Carp Fair, Sept 24-27

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Introduction to Rock Gardens & Rock Garden Plants – September 1 – 7:30 pm

Caroline Dabrus, Master Gardener

Old Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata

Hosted by Kanata-March Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$5)

Making Daylily Babies in the Backyard – September 2 – 7:00 pm

Kelly Noel, Master Gardener

St. Andrews Presbyterian Church Hall, 39 Bridge St., Carleton Place.

Hosted by Carleton Place & District Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$3)

Up and Down the Garden Walls with Vines – September 2 – 7:15 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Portland Community Hall, 24 Water Street, Portland

Hosted by Rideau Lakes Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$5)

Forcing Bulbs – September 9 – 7:30pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Carveth Care Centre, Herbert Street, Gananoque

Hosted by Gananoque Horticultural Society (Guest fee: N/A)

Making Scents of your Garden – September 24 – 7:30 pm

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

380 Springfield Road, Ottawa

Hosted by the Rockcliffe Garden Club (No guest fee)

Making Daylily Babies in the Backyard – September 28 – 7:00 pm

Kelly Noel, Master Gardener

Cornerstone Community Church, 1728 Concession 11, Almonte

Hosted by Almonte and District Horticultural Society (No guest fee)

You Are Not Done Yet (fall gardening) – October 6 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Old Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata

Hosted by Kanata-March Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$5)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: mgottawaspeakers@gmail.com

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>

August TO DO List

- Keep your 'move' list handy. As the weather cools down, watch for a weather forecast that includes a few days of rain so that perennials and shrubs that are in the wrong place can be relocated and re-established into their new location.
- Make plans to add some spring bulbs to the garden this fall. They'll be available in the stores in early September.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

For some people, deadheading is one of those garden tasks that is a dreaded chore. Yet no one will argue that once the deadheading is completed, the garden looks refreshed and tidy again.

Deadheading is not just about aesthetics. It is also a great way to reduce weeding; removing the spent flowers before the seed matures eliminates self-seeding. Of course there are cases when self-seeding is desirable, but you can control how little or how much of it occurs.

Another reason to deadhead is to ensure the plant's energy goes into the plant instead of into seed production.

A number of flowers are considered 'self-cleaning' (such as some of the new petunias and calibrachos) and require no deadheading.

Deadheading will produce a second (lesser) flush of blooms on certain flowers (i.e., lupins, salvia and daisies).



'Before & after' deadheading

Yet other perennials are deadheaded for appearance only and will not produce more or less flowers after a clean-up (daylilies).

Deadheading can be as painstaking as removing every single faded blossom or as easy as shearing off the flower stalks that protrude over the

plant. Dianthus or hardy geraniums are good examples of plants that can be sheared with a pair of scissors.