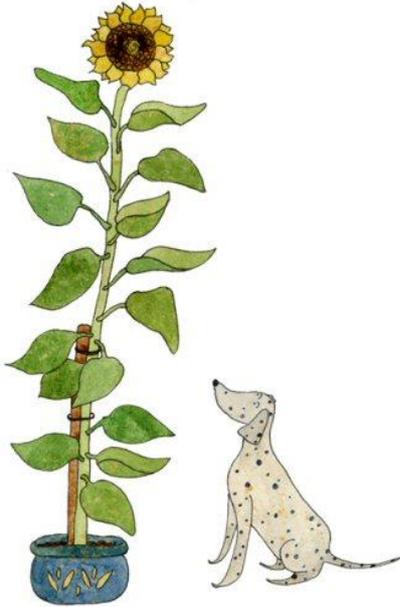


GROW GIANT SUNFLOWERS



What do we need to start?

- Some 1 litre plastic bottles
- Some plastic pots/containers
- Compost or compost/soil mixture
- A packet of Giant sunflower seeds. If there are a lot of seeds, you could share some with a friend. Plant food/fertiliser (like "Miracle Grow", etc)
- Some space to plant
- Stakes or canes and garden twine (for tying in)
- Time: 20 minutes or so throughout the growing season

General Tips

Sunflower seeds are easy to grow, have a long growing season and are great to use for children's competitions either grown in pots or the garden. The flower is big, bright yellow and in the autumn small birds will eat the seeds. A sunflower seed is quite big, but it will not germinate if the soil is too wet and cold.

Sowing into Pots

1. For early sowing in late April or May place one seed (2cm deep) in a small pot filled with moist compost or soil and placed in a warm, light, airy position. The seeds should germinate in 15 to 20 days; two big green leaves will appear.
2. Once germinated the plant will grow quite quickly and need plenty of light before being potted-on. Only pot-on when the plant is strong and roots start to appear at the bottom of the pot. If the plant grows too rapidly it can become weak and floppy. To avoid this, give the plant plenty of light and move it to a cooler position; avoid frost.
3. Repotting may have to be carried out several times before the plant is in its final container or planted out into the garden when the warmer weather arrives.
4. Generally the growing sunflower will need support when it is 25 to 30cm tall. A sunflower can grow to 2 metres and will need to be loosely tied to a supporting stick or post a few times along its length.

5. Before putting pots outside or planting sunflowers in the garden, the plants should be hardened-off. Only put sunflower plants outside or plant in the garden when all possibility of frost has passed.
6. Sunflowers need regular watering to grow well. They also need protection from slugs and snails that eat the young, tender plants. Once established, just watch them grow.
7. In June sunflower seeds can be sown directly into the garden (see direct sowing below); protect them from pests.

Sowing into Plastic Bottles

1. Cut the neck off a plastic bottle at the widest point. Cut the bottom of the bottle so it can be folded back as a hinge.
2. Nearly fill the bottle with moist compost or soil and place a sunflower seed in the middle (2cm deep).
3. Once germinated the sunflower plant can be kept in the bottle and transferred outside when the weather conditions are suitable; generally in June when there is no frost.
4. When the sunflower roots are at the bottom of the bottle move it to the final planting position in the garden or a large container.
5. Loosen the garden/container soil, dig a small hole, fold back the hinged bottom of the bottle and carefully place it in the hole. The bottle will protect the plant from slugs and snails but it will need support.

Sowing directly in the garden

1. There will be instructions on the seed packet on how to plant the seeds. If the weather is a little warmer (May, June), you can plant the seeds directly outside. Choose the place where you want the plant to grow so it will not be set back by replanting if you have to move it. Make sure there is a decent depth of soil in the bed and add a small amount of plant food (although you can add this once the plant begins to grow). The seeds should be planted about 2cm deep.
2. Make sure the soil around the plants doesn't dry out and then that's all you can do until the plants get to about 25cm high. Once this big they should be staked and lightly tied in to a stake or cane to protect them from wind damage.

3. There is not much else to do now but watch the plants grow. You could measure their height every week and make a graph charting their growth. If you are growing sunflowers in more than one place then you could compare their growth. This will give some comparison of the growing conditions in each spot. You can also make comparison with how friends' plants are progressing. You should still make sure your plants don't dry out and you could also add a bit of plant food but don't overdo this.
4. The sunflowers should go on growing until October. By this time the flowers should be really big and the plants really really tall.