

Sunflower

Your sunflower seed was planted in a pot designed to decompose in the garden. The pot is made of peat and the roots of the plant will grow through the pot into the earth. You can plant your pot into a larger container, or plant it into the garden. Cover the whole pot with soil, including the rim. It is best not to transplant your small plant.

Sunflowers like full sun. This means that the spot you plant the sunflower in should receive at least 6 hours of sun during the day. Your plant will grow best in well drained soil, and will love some extra compost to nourish it. Keep the soil around your sunflower moist, but not soggy. When watering your plant, try not to get the leaves wet. This helps the plant avoid diseases such as powdery mildew and fungi.

Your sunflower will produce a daisy shaped flower on its stem about 55 days after it was planted. This variety of sunflower is called "Junior" and will reach a height of 60 cm. (There are other types of sunflowers that can reach 2 meters!) You can help the plant make more flowers by pinching off the top two leaves when they are small, to encourage the plant to make additional stems and leaves. Then the plant will grow additional flowers on each stem. Birds love to eat sunflower seeds and you may have to cover the maturing flower heads with paper bags or netting, as the seeds ripen on the plants.

To harvest the sunflower seeds, cut the seed heads leaving 30 cm of stem attached and hang the flower head in an airy place, safe from birds and rodents for 2-3 weeks. Remove the seeds by rubbing two heads together. You might want to share some of your seeds with the birds and squirrels in a feeder. You can save some of the seeds by placing them in an envelope. Write the colour and the name of your plant on the envelope so you can remember what it was. You can plant the seeds in small pots indoors in April, or you can plant them directly into the garden after the long weekend in May. It takes 10-14 days for the seeds to germinate.

To avoid plant diseases, remove and discard stalks in the fall. Avoid over-crowding the plants when you start them in the garden by spacing each plant 25-30 cm apart. It is best not to plant them in the same place each year, but to try different locations. Gardeners, like farmers, try to rotate the kind of plants they seed, so the insects and mildews do not become concentrated in one spot near one variety of plant.

Gardening is something you learn by doing. Observe your plant as it grows. If you want to send us a photo or write us an email about how your plant did, we would love to hear from you.

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