

# Sunflowers for Cut Flower Sales

If you can grow sweet corn or zucchini, then you can grow [sunflowers](#)! That is right, the flower that instantly puts smiles on faces and tells a story of happy times is a great addition for vegetable producers. Marketing sunflowers throughout the summer and into the fall season is very achievable as sweet corn growers have found the planting and production of sunflowers is similar, and that increased sales at farm markets, road side stands, and farmers markets is highly achievable.

## Variety Selection

Knowing your market is the key to variety selection.

### *Pollen-Free vs Sunflowers with Pollen*

Modern sunflowers are bred to be male sterile, or [pollen-free](#), to help foster extended vase life and a nice clean appearance of flower heads that wholesalers and florists have come to demand. Growers looking for a lower cost point find success with the sunflowers with pollen.

### *Single Stem vs Branching*

Single stem varieties are best for high density plantings and are programmable for consistently beautiful flowers on tall stems. Succession planting will be needed for continuous harvest throughout the season. Branching varieties produce multiple shorter stems over the season, ideal for mixed bouquets and roadside sales.

### *Season of Sales*

With more diversity in the “look” of sunflowers, maximize your sunflower sales by selecting varieties based on the sales season. Spring sales have a focus on pastel or light shaded petals combined with light colored disks. As you move into summer the warm brown disks with brightly colored yellow or gold petals take over the marketplace. For Fall, choose flowers in warm shades of burgundy, maroon, or bi-colors, all with very dark brown centers.

## Planting Details

### *Direct Sow vs Transplanting*

Seed can be sown directly in the field or pre-started indoors and transplanted to field in 2-4 weeks.

### *Field spacing*

Single stem varieties are best for high density plantings to produce tall stems, while the branching types produce multiple shorter stems over the season.

#### *Single Stem Varieties*

Spacing: 4-9 inches

Pinching: NOT RECCOMENDED

Adjust spacing between plants to control bloom size and stem diameter to fit your market.

Spacing: 4-6 inches. Produce small 5”-6” flowers common in the floral trade.

Spacing: 7-9 inches. Produce large 7”-10” flowers ideal for bunching.

#### *Branching Varieties*

Spacing: 12-24 inches

Pinching: At 12-15 inches

Wide spacing on branching varieties allows for greater length in secondary branches. For consistent and longer stems, pinch at 12-15 inches.

Temperature Minimums	
Soil: 70°F	Air: 55°F
Planting Depth	Days to Germ
¼ - ½ inch	4-8



### ***Seed needs***

Many growers are looking at seeds per acre. However, with cut flower sunflowers we generally do not plant in that scale. Use this fantastic calculator from [Omni Calculator](#) to figure out the plants you need per the space you want to plant. For growers looking to plant branching types who just want a large block of color use our '[Seeds Per Acre Chart](#)'.

### ***Succession Planting***

Continual harvest can be achieved by succession planting your favorite varieties every 7-10 days. For a second option, choose varieties with different maturity dates and plant at the same time to minimize your plantings to every 20-25 days (See variety suggestions below).

<a href="#">Premier Series</a>	(45-55 days)
<a href="#">Sunrich Summer Series</a>	(50-60 days)
<a href="#">Sunrich Series</a>	(60-70 days)

### **Post-Harvest Details**

Recommendations for best vase life

- Cut when the petals, or ray flowers just begin to open, before they have opened off the disc completely. (See image)
- Cut into plain water after stripping leaves.
- Transfer to a holding solution – extends life of blooms up to 4 days.
  - Due to negative impact on vase life of sunflowers we recommend not using hydrators or flower food.
- Check water regularly. Sunflowers are heavy drinkers and can empty a bucket overnight.
- Disinfect buckets between usage, dirty buckets will shorten vase life.
- Change water daily. Sunflowers have what many growers call a dirty stem, as water quickly turns cloudy with potential for bacterial issues.

A vase life of 11-12 days is average with orange and gold sunflowers ([Pro Cut](#), [Sunrich](#), [Vincent's](#), etc.). Based on trials at [North Carolina State University](#), most bi-color varieties have a shorter vase life when compared to orange and gold types. [Helios Flame](#) shows great holding ability (11-12 days) where most other bi-colors average 9-10 days with a holding solution (7-8 days in water).

***For speed and ease use the [Earthway Precision Garden Seeder!](#)***

Farmers have seen great success using the Earthway seeder, and multiple [plates](#) are useful for direct sowing sunflowers. Each plate accepts different size seed and drops the seed at different spacing. For more control over spacing, skip seed drops (apply hot glue to fill holes in plate) or increase the space between your rows helping achieve optimal spacing.

Beet Plate: 3.6" spacing

Cucumber Plate: 9" spacing

Popcorn Plate: 9" spacing

***Ideal stage of harvest***

