

SUNFLOWER

Scientific Name: *Helianthus annuus*

Dakota Name: Wahchazi tanka

Ojibwe Name: Ziinda`aagan

Other:

INTRODUCTION

The common sunflower is a tall, bright yellow flower with a dark center. Some varieties come in orange and dark red. It is well known for following the sun as it grows, a process called heliotropism. Sunflowers produce large, edible seeds that are a valuable food source. The plant has a strong, sturdy stem and rough, heart-shaped leaves that are arranged opposite on the stem. It is an important plant for both humans and wildlife.

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ECOLOGY

Sunflowers thrive in open fields, prairies, and gardens. They prefer full sunlight and well-drained soil. Their deep roots help prevent soil erosion, and their flowers attract pollinators like bees and butterflies. Birds and small mammals rely on sunflower seeds for food.



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HISTORY

The common sunflower has been grown by Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. The Dakota and Ojibwe used sunflowers as an important food source, storing seeds for winter and pressing or boiling them for oil. When European settlers arrived, they quickly stole sunflowers for food and decoration. Today, sunflowers remain an important part of Indigenous agriculture and food traditions.



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TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Indigenous peoples deeply respect sunflowers. They symbolize strength, nourishment, and the sun's power. The Dakota and Ojibwe have long cultivated sunflowers for their food and ceremonial significance. Sunflower seeds are high in healthy fats and vitamins. Some Indigenous traditions use sunflower tea to soothe coughs and fevers, while sunflower oil is used for skin care.

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FORAGING AND HARVESTING




Sunflower seeds are ready to harvest in late summer or early fall when the flower heads dry and the seeds turn dark. The Dakota and Ojibwe peoples traditionally gather the seeds for food and oil, sometimes drying them for storage. The young, tender shoots, as well as the young leaves and petals, are edible.

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PRESERVATION




Sunflower seeds can be dried and stored for long periods. They are often roasted for better flavor. Indigenous peoples traditionally pounded the seeds into meal or pressed them for oil, preserving their nutrients for winter use.

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COMMON THREATS

Sunflowers are hardy but can sometimes be affected by fungal diseases or pests like aphids and birds. Traditionally, people would use natural methods such as planting sunflowers alongside other crops to attract beneficial insects that control pests.



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CULINARY USES

Sunflower seeds are eaten raw, roasted, or ground into flour. The oil can be used for cooking. The young flower shoots, buds, and leaves are also edible.