

## It's a Gardener's World!

No flower can lift someone's spirits quite like sunflowers. They are bright and cheery, and as warm and inviting as the sweet summer sun. With brilliant yellow petals, also known as "rays," sunflowers have an unmistakable sun-like appearance that has made them a crowd favourite, especially in the summer months. Recently, I've seen vases of sunflowers in people's windows, there's a whole row of them in the newly-created garden next to The Mill, & if we'd been looking forward to Stokesley Show, young Jack Elliot would be on to a winner with his tall sunflowers growing beside his front door!



**Helianthus Annuus, the common sunflower, is from the flower family called Asteraceae.**

The Latin name of Helianthus Annuus comes from a combination of Greek words. **Helios** translates to sun and **anthos** means flower. The literal meaning of this word is that it is a flower of the sun. Helios was the Greek sun god and Anthos was actually a Greek name used for boys.

The sunflower is native or indigenous to America where its history began. In the 16th century, Incan priestesses in Peru worshipped a giant variety of the sunflower plant. This plant was a symbol of their Incan sun god. The Incan priestesses wore clothing that was adorned with large flower shaped ornaments. These ornaments and decorations were made from gold. Images showing these designs have been discovered in Peruvian temples.

It is believed that it was a very important Native American crop. Like the Incan priestesses that came before them, Native Americans also worshipped the plant. They held spiritual ceremonies such as the Sun Dance. As well as being a food source, the flower became a symbol of strength and endurance. They would put sunflower seeds on top of graves containing their dead.

Now this plant is a major oil crop for the USA and also the international market. It is used for many purposes from cooking oil, seed for birds and as colour in dyes. It is also the state flower of Kansas. With the European exploration of the New World, the flower's popularity spread, as the rest of the world began to appreciate its beauty and sustenance.

Artists throughout history loved the sunflower's unique splendour - those of the Impressionist era were especially fixated on the flower. We are all familiar with Van Gogh's famous painting of Sunflowers. Sunflowers had a special significance for Van Gogh. Yellow, for him, was an emblem of happiness. Today, sunflowers remain a highly recognized flower, admired for its sunny charm and delightful disposition.

Many people view this flower as being highly spiritual. These flowers appear as if they follow the sun as it moves each day from East to West in the sky. They hold their heads high as if in worship & adoration of the sun. It makes the flowers look as if they are highly loyal and devout, just as a follower of faith is. They are therefore a symbol of true and faithful loyalty to something that is much brighter and bigger than themselves.

 **A Symbol of Steadfast Loyalty, Everlasting Faith and Adoration**

Even though science has proved that this plant doesn't actually follow the sun all day, it is still the plant that people most widely associate with this idea.

For this reason and with how it has been seen through the ages, it is always going to be a symbol of unswerving faith, loyalty and dedicated love, devotion and adoration.

### **A Symbol of Optimism and Happiness**

The shape and the colour of the sunflower heads and their bright yellow, orange and red petals are symbolic of the sun. This flower represents happiness, radiance and all things that are positive. In this way, sunflowers are perfect for happy occasions. You can use them for all kinds of joyous events and celebrations such as weddings, engagement parties, baby showers and birthdays.

### **A Symbol of Longevity**

In China, this flower symbolizes longevity or long life. It may be due to the sun which is perceived to have an enduring life even though eventually it will die out. On a practical note, when these plant stems are cut to make flowers for vases and bouquets, they can last for 2-3 weeks so are quite hardy.

### **A Symbol of Good Fortune and Good Luck**

In dreams, the sunflower is believed to be a very lucky symbol or motif. It is viewed as symbolizing career and employment ambitions, wealth, good fortune and positive opportunities. This flower is quite the lucky charm for someone who may be beginning on a new career path or starting a job.

"The sunflower looks forward for the brightness of tomorrow." This quote reminds me of how you and I should be towards the Father's son, Jesus. Just like the sunflower, we should be turning our face towards the Son. Matthew 17 tells us about the Transfiguration & v2 reads 'There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.' When the darkness seems to press in on us, when we feel gloomy or depressed, especially because of present circumstances, we should look to him – he is Light, he is Life. If we allow Him He will shine bright and pierce our darkest places until they become light. This I know.

"Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you,  
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.  
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I".  
Isaiah 58:8-9