

Super sunflowers: Sunflowers grown by Margaret Plummer of Farmington Hills competed in both categories. On the cover: Kevin Dean Groth of Bloomfield Hills grew several contenders.



cover story



Third place: Susan Dyszynski of Rochester Hills grew the third tallest sunflower in our sunflower contest. Photos by Marty Figley.

Sunflower growers have a field day

BY MARTY FIGLEY
Special Writer

Another successful sunflower contest has come to an end and we are pleased to announce that 81 of you entered. We wish we could have visited with all of you, but time restrictions made that impossible. You are all winners in our eyes and we hope you enjoyed growing your sunflowers as much as we enjoyed sponsoring the contest.

At Home editor Mary Klemic and I visited the 12 finalists and now announce the winners.

Tallest sunflower: first place - 12 feet nine inches, Matthew Schriber, 8, of

Livonia; second place - 12 feet five inches, John Shurge of Garden City; third place - 12 feet 1/2-inch, Susan Dyszynski of Rochester Hills.

Largest seedhead: first place - 17-1/2 inches, Pauline LeBrun of Westland; second place - 17 inches, Brian Spehar of Garden City; third place - 15-1/2 inches, Christine Koppy of Redford.

In addition to the winners, other sunflower growers were successful with tall plants and large seedheads. Some of the winners were contenders in both categories.

Kevin Dean Groth, 9-1/2, of Bloomfield Hills grew several sunflowers with the largest one 11 feet 9-1/2 inches tall.

He also had one with a seedhead at 14 inches, which tied with that of Margaret Plummer of Farmington Hills, who also grew a plant 11 feet 6-1/4 inches tall. Christine Koppy grew many plants and the tallest was 11 feet 7-1/4 inches, while John Shurge had a seedhead that was 15 inches across.

Mary Randinitis' Dearborn sunflower had a seedhead that was 15 inches across. Carolyn Gansen's Livonia sunflower measured 14-3/4 inches, and Katie Olsen's of Rochester was 13-1/2 inches.

Matthew found his winning sunflower quite heavy and said he "didn't do anything special to grow it." John planted his second place sunflower near the air conditioner where distilled water watered it, fertilized with Vigoro 15-30-15 four times and mulched with grass clippings. He found a cardinal eating the seeds of the sunflower and cut it down; after we measured it he was going to put it back on a pole for the cardinal to enjoy.

"Plant something near a water spigot," John suggested to gardeners.

Susan planted the third place "Moon-walker," which, as well as growing tall, grew 11 small flowers, the largest being only about four inches.

"I used Milorganite two times and depended on whatever rain we had," she said.

Pauline's sunflower head was so heavy she used a bungee cord to attach it to the fence and roof. She used Miracle-Gro three times and watered regularly. After the plants sprouted she transplanted several or gave them away.

"I kept one to nurture," she said. "I'll give seeds to my children and their families to plant next year."

The Brian Spehar family enjoyed their sunflowers.

"I put mulched leaves on the ground in the fall and rototilled them in the spring," he said. "I planted them on the first of May and they grew with the corn."

The squirrels and birds attacked the seeds so he cut the head off the plant. Seeds will be saved for next year.

Christine and Jeff Koppy live next door to 1994's second place winners (the Cartiers), so thought they might have a chance in the contest. They planted a long row of sunflowers that made a

wonderful privacy screen. They used Monstera-Grow, an organic fertilizer, two times and watered every day.

"It's the first time I've used organic fertilizer and boy, what a difference," he said.

Their two boys love to eat the seeds, as do the birds and squirrels who "are having a field day."

Kevin's sunflower experience began with an anticipated Monarch butterfly garden at Conant school. Students took the heads to a class contest to see which one had the most seeds.

"I watered when they needed it, when no rain came and it was exciting to watch them grow," Kevin said.

Several contestants started the seeds in preschool or kindergarten.

Honorable mention goes to Edgar and Maida Peabody of Westland, who discovered a determined sunflower that grew out of a crack in their cement driveway.

The plant grew to about eight feet tall and had from 50 to 60 blooms on it. Edgar said he feeds the birds both the black and the striped sunflower seeds, and doesn't know which kind produced the plant. The neighbors as well as the Peabodys have enjoyed the plant. The Peabodys said they were "going to leave it for the birds 'till frost or until something happens to it."

We are delighted with the enthusiasm of all the people who entered the contest.

As promised, here is a cookie recipe using the kernels of the sunflower seeds:

SUNFLOWER CRISPIES

Makes three dozen

1/2 cup margarine or butter, softened

1/2 cup white sugar

1/2 cup brown sugar

1/3 cup vegetable oil

1 egg

2 cups white flour

1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 cup roasted, salted sunflower kernels

OPTIONAL: 1 teaspoon of cinnamon, or cardamom, or coriander

In medium mixing bowl, beat together first four ingredients. Add egg and beat well for two to three minutes. Sift together next three ingredients; stir into creamed mixture. Stir in sunflower kernels. Drop dough onto parchment lined or ungreased cookie sheet with teaspoon. Bake in preheated 375-degree oven for 10 to 12 minutes. The cookies will melt in your mouth.

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