**Helianthus annuus ‘Sonja’ Sonja Sunflower**

Edward F. Gilman

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**Introduction**

Sunflower is a short-lived annual with large, striking flowers (Fig. 1). Large types grow to 12 feet tall, but many garden cultivars are 4 to 5 feet tall. The familiar flowers have yellowish petals with a brown central disc, and grow to 6 to 12 inches across. Plants are seeded in late winter to early spring in Florida, produce lovely flowers in mid-spring, and decline quickly in the heat by late spring to early-summer. Plants in Florida installed in the fall can produce a nice flower display for several weeks in the fall.

**General Information**

- **Scientific name:** Helianthus annuus ‘Sonja’
- **Pronunciation:** heel-ee-ANTH-us AN-yoo-us
- **Common name(s):** ‘Sonja’ sunflower
- **Family:** Compositae
- **Plant type:** annual
- **USDA hardiness zones:** all zones (Fig. 2)
- **Planting month for zone 7:** Apr; May
- **Planting month for zone 8:** Mar; Apr
- **Planting month for zone 9:** Feb; Mar
- **Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** Dec; Jan; Feb
- **Origin:** native to North America
- **Uses:** specimen; accent; mass planting
- **Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

**Description**

- **Height:** 2 to 6 feet
- **Spread:** 1 to 2 feet

**Plant habit:** upright  
**Plant density:** open  
**Growth rate:** fast  
**Texture:** coarse

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Flower
Flower color: yellow
Flower characteristic: showy

Fruit
Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: black
Fruit characteristic: suited for human consumption; attracts birds

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: not applicable
Current year stem/twig color: green
Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

Culture
Light requirement: plant grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: unknown
Plant spacing: 18 to 24 inches

Other
Roots: not applicable
Winter interest: not applicable
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: may self-seed each year
Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

Use and Management
The cultivar ‘Valentine’ has good uniformity and flowers well in Florida. It has a better overall appearance than either ‘Floristan’ or ‘Hallo’. ‘Floristan’ has mahogany and light-yellow bicolored flowers; ‘Hallo’ has bright golden flowers; ‘Valentine’ has lemon-yellow flowers. ‘Sonja’ has big, yellow-orange flowers.

Pest and Diseases
‘Valentine’ is host to heavy infestations of sweet potato whitefly. ‘Big Smile’ had no infestation in trials conducted central Florida. Leaf spots can cause severe leaf necrosis.