


   


1–2 ft; 6 ft
Nectar



Dune sunflower

Of Florida's 17 native sunflower species, gardeners will most often find Dune or Beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*). Dune sunflower naturally occurs along the coast, but adapts well for inland use.

Description

Dune sunflower, a perennial with bright yellow flowers, blooms throughout the year. It will die back in North Florida in winter. Depending on the variety (see Caution), this plant may be spreading or upright. As a groundcover, it may sprawl several feet, but generally is no more than 1 or 2 feet high. The upright variety can be taller.

Planting

Give Dune sunflower room to roam, as it spreads readily. Plant in masses 3 to 4 feet apart. Do not irrigate after establishment. Plants can reseed prolifically. Seedlings may be carefully dug up and relocated. Be sure to water transplanted seedlings well until they are established.

Seeds

Seeds are available commercially. To collect your own, allow flower heads to dry on the plants, then break them open to collect seeds.

Plants

Dune sunflower is readily available in containers from native nurseries. It also is often available at commercial garden centers. (See Caution.)

Care

Dune sunflower will get leggy and messy-looking over time. Remove old stems and let new plants sprout from seeds. Light trims every three months will help keep

foliage looking fresh. This plant will also regenerate from the rootstock if winters are mild.

Site conditions

Plant dune sunflower in full sun for best flowering. Plants will tolerate light shade for part of the day.

Dune sunflower is salt and wind tolerant. It likes exceedingly well-drained sandy soils. Avoid persistently moist or heavily irrigated situations.

Hardiness zones

Dune sunflower does best when used in zones 8A–11.

Butterflies and bees

All of Florida's native sunflowers are excellent nectar plants for butterflies and pollinators.

Other species

Narrowleaf sunflower (*H. angustifolius*) also may be available at nurseries specializing in native plants. It naturally grows throughout the Panhandle, North and Central Florida south to Lake Okeechobee and is suitable for zones 8A–10A. It prefers moist acidic soils.

Narrowleaf sunflower's showy golden flowers are 3 inches across with reddish-brown centers. It can reach 4 to 6 feet in height. It has long narrow, rough leaves and blooms in the fall. It may die back in winter, particularly in North Florida. It's a great choice for a large, sunny, moist meadow; a lake edge or retention pond; a ditch; or the back of a bog garden. It spreads aggressively by its roots and may outcompete other wildflowers in a small garden.

Space plants 2 to 3 feet apart. Consider using them where you won't mind seeing spent stems and flowers after a bloom. Stems can be pinched back in late spring or early summer to encourage shorter, bushier growth and more blooms. Divide plants for using elsewhere.

Gardeners may encounter two other species: Rayless sunflower (*H. radula*) and Lakeside sunflower (*H. carnosus*). Rayless sunflower has no sunny yellow ray flowers — just dark, purplish flowerheads on 2- to 3-foot stems in the fall. Despite the lack of ray flowers, Rayless sunflower attracts many small bees and butterflies.

Its leaves are also unusual — large, round, thick and relatively flat on the ground. You can use this plant in well-drained moist soils from Lake Okeechobee northward. Mix in a few with ornamental grasses and other wildflowers for visual contrast.

Lakeside sunflower blooms from late spring to fall with showy 3-inch yellow flowers with greenish-yellow centers. The 1- to 3-foot stems rise from an evergreen basal rosette. Central and North Florida gardeners can use it in moist-to-wet soils.

Use Rayless and Lakeside sunflowers in zones 8A–9B.



Rayless sunflower

There are three distinct subspecies of Dune sunflower: East Coast dune sunflower, West Coast dune sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*

subsp. *vestitus*) and Cucumberleaf dune sunflower (*H. debilis* subsp. *cucumerifolius*). Most native nurseries should know the difference; other nurseries may not. Environmentally conscientious gardeners living along the coast should ask their nursery supplier for the subspecies native to their locale. This will help preserve the distinct identities and ecological roles of these plants.

Narrowleaf sunflower naturally ranges as far west as Texas and as far north as New York. Large retail outlets and national seed suppliers sell varieties originating from out of state. Their performance in your landscape can be different than Florida ecotypes.

CAUTION