

Dune sunflower

(*Helianthus debilis*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Dune (or beach) sunflower occurs naturally along the coast but adapts well for inland use. It typically blooms in summer, but may flower year-round in South Florida. Its bright flowers attract a variety of pollinators, including butterflies, moths and bees. Its dense growth pattern provides cover for many small animals, while its seeds are eaten by birds.

Yellow daisy-like flowers consist of brownish-red disk florets surrounded by bright yellow ray florets. Leaves are deltoid-shaped, with rough surfaces and toothed margins; they are alternately arranged.

Family: Asteraceae (Aster, daisy or composite family)

Native range: *H. debilis* is native only to the counties

along the east coast. However, there are two subspecies: *H. debilis* subsp. *cucumerifolius*

(Cucumberleaf dune sunflower), which is native to scattered counties throughout the Panhandle

and a few peninsular counties; and *H. debilis* subsp. *vestitus* (West coast dune sunflower), which is endemic only to Pinellas, Hillsborough, Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte and Lee counties. (See caution below.)

To see where native populations of each subspecies occurs naturally in Florida, visit:

- www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/Plant.aspx?id=660 (*H. debilis*)
- www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/Plant.aspx?id=3367 (*H. debilis* subsp. *cucumerifolius*)
- www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/Plant.aspx?id=1249 (*H. debilis* subsp. *vestitus*).

Hardiness: Zones 8A–11

Soil: Dry, well-drained sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun

Growth habit: 1–2' tall with 3–4' spread

Propagation: Seed, cuttings

Garden tips: Dune sunflower can tolerate salt and wind. Plant in full sun for best flowering. It is a prolific self-seeder, and has a tendency to spread quickly if not maintained. Periodic removal of spent plants is recommended. Depending on the variety, this plant may be spreading or upright. As a groundcover, it may sprawl several feet but generally is no more than 2 feet high. West coast dune sunflower can be taller.

Caution: All subspecies are capable of hybridizing and should not be planted together. When using in a landscape or garden setting, it is recommended that the subspecies native to/appropriate for the region be used. Environmentally conscientious gardeners living along the coast should ask their nursery for the subspecies native to their locale. This will help preserve the distinct identities and ecological roles of these plants.

Seeds of the East coast subspecies are available through the Florida Wildflowers Growers Cooperative. Plants are often available at nurseries that specialize in native plants. Visit PlantRealFlorida.org to find a native nursery in your area.



Photo by Stacey Matrazzo