

Rayless sunflower

(*Helianthus radula*)

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

Rayless sunflower is a unique member of the *Helianthus* or sunflower genus. It occurs naturally in sandy uplands, along moist to dry roadsides, and in seasonally wet savannahs and pine flatwoods. It typically blooms late spring into early fall, attracting a variety of butterflies and other pollinators.

Like most sunflowers, its flowerhead includes a compact but relatively large center composed of many small, maroon to dull brown disk florets. But unlike its relatives, its ray florets are almost entirely absent, hence the common name “rayless.” (Some specimens do produce a few small, yellow ray florets.) Each plant typically produces a single flowerhead. Basal leaves are thick and rounded with rough, hairy surfaces. Stem leaves are few, elliptic to ovate and hairy, becoming reduced in size as they ascend the stem. They are oppositely arranged. Stems are also hairy.

The genus name *Helianthus* is from the Greek *helios*, or “sun,” and *anthos*, or “flower.” The species epithet *radula* is from the Latin *radula*, meaning “scraper,” referring to the roughness of the leaf surfaces.

Family: Asteraceae (Composite or daisy family)

Native range: Panhandle, most of Central and North Florida, and Collier County

To see where natural populations of Rayless sunflower have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zones 8A–9B

Soil: Seasonally moist to dry, sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun

Growth habit: 1–2' tall

Propagation: Seeds

Garden tips: Appreciate Rayless sunflower for its unusual flowerheads and large basal leaves. It is a great addition to a home pollinator garden, as it easily adapts to a variety of conditions and will attract butterflies as well as other pollinators. It does best in open, sunny areas. Plant with a mix of Chalky bluestem or Muhlygrass for a striking display.

Rayless sunflower seeds are available through the Florida Wildflower Growers Cooperative at www.FloridaWildflowers.com. Plants are often available at nurseries that specialize in native plants. Visit PlantRealFlorida.org to find a native nursery on your area.



Photo by Eleanor Dietrich