

Showy Fall Blooming Perennial: Maximilian Sunflower, *Helianthus maximiliani*

Description: *Helianthus, maximiliani*, Maximilian Sunflower is a tall native prairie perennial found throughout Texas. Although it usually reaches 4 to 6 feet tall, it can grow to as little as 1 foot in a dry area or as tall as 10 feet in a moist one. Each plant will grow into a large colony with multiple stems. Leaves are alternating, sickle-shaped, and grayish-green and are 4-8 inches long, often folded. It was named for Prince Maximilian von Wied-Neuwied, a German naturalist who explored the American West in the 1830s. Like many perennials in North Texas, it goes dormant over the winter.

Flowers and Fruit: Usually blooming in September and October, Maximilian Sunflower's golden yellow flowers are found in spikes and can be few or numerous, depending on conditions. Each flower head is 1 ½ to 3 inches across, with 15 to 19 ray flowers. The central yellow disc flowers are 1 inch across and produce abundant seed after flowering.



Photo courtesy of Christina Wasson

Planting sites: Maximilian Sunflower thrives in full sun and tolerates partial sun. Many people plant it at the back of the garden because of its height and the fact that as the plant grows, the lower leaves sometimes die, not a beautiful sight. Its height allows it to be used as a tall screen or used as part of a fence row. Maximilian Sunflower pairs well with tall native prairie grasses. If it grows too tall, it can be pruned during summer to 3 feet tall until mid August when the bud stalk starts to grow.

Watering Instructions: Maximilian Sunflower may need a little supplemental water only during its first growing season, if it's a dry year. After it is established, it is drought tolerant and can thrive on existing rainfall.

Comments: Maximilian Sunflower is truly spectacular in the fall with its showy yellow flower spikes that bloom all at once. It attracts beneficial insects and migrating butterflies such as Monarchs and produces abundant seeds that feed many species of birds. The seed stalks may be left standing through winter for birds to feed on, then trimmed back to the ground before new season's growth begins.

Look for the NICE! Plant of the Season signs and information sheets on your next visit to a participating North Texas nursery. Thank you for using native plants in your landscapes.

Trinity Forks Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas meetings are the 4th Thursday in Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May, Sep & Oct, at 6:30 pm on the 2nd floor, ACT Building, Texas Woman's University in Denton, TX.