



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## ***Helianthus annuus* 'Sonja'**<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman<sup>2</sup>

### **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



Figure 1. 'Sonja' Sunflower.

**Spread:** 1 to 2 feet

**Plant habit:** upright

**Plant density:** open

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** coarse

### **Foliage**

### **Description**

**Height:** 2 to 6 feet

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate  
**Leaf type:** simple  
**Leaf margin:** dentate  
**Leaf shape:** ovate  
**Leaf venation:** pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** not applicable  
**Leaf blade length:** 8 to 12 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** not applicable  
**Fall characteristic:** not applicable

**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.

### **Pests and Diseases**

'Valentine' is host to heavy infestations of Sweetpotato whitefly. 'Big Smile' had no infestation in trials conducted in central Florida.

Leaf spots can cause severe leaf necrosis.