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

Figure 1. ‘Sonja’ Sunflower.
Helianthus annuus 'Sonja' Sonja Sunflower

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**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

**Description**

**Height:** 2 to 6 feet

**Spread:** 1 to 2 feet

**Plant habit:** upright

**Plant density:** open

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** coarse

**Foliage**

**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

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
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.

Pest and Diseases

'Valentine' is host to heavy infestations of Sweet potato whitefly. 'Big Smile' had no infestation in trials conducted central Florida. Leaf spots can cause severe leaf necrosis.

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