

Wild Sunflower³

Helianthus giganteus. Composite Family.

Stem.—Rough or hairy; from three to ten feet high; branched above.
Leaves.—Lance-shaped; pointed; rough to touch, set close to the stem.
Flower-heads.—Yellow; composed of both ray and disk-flowers.

In late summer many of our lanes are hedged by this beautiful plant, which, like other members of its family, lifts its yellow flowers sunward in pale imitation of the great life-giver itself.

We have found twenty-two species of sunflower.

H. divaricatus is of a lower growth, with opposite, widely spreading leaves and larger flower heads.

H. annuus is the garden species familiar to all; this is said to be a native of Peru. Mr. Ellwanger writes regarding it: "In the mythology of the ancient Peruvians it occupied an important place, and was employed as a mystic decoration in ancient Mexican sculpture. Like the lotus of the East, it is equally a sacred and an artistic emblem, figuring in the symbolism of Mexico and Peru, where the Spaniards found it rearing its aspiring stalk in the fields, and serving in the temple as a sign and a decoration, the sun-god's officiating handmaidens wearing upon their breasts representations of the sacred flower in beaten gold."

Gerarde describes it as follows: "The Indian Sun, or the golden floure of Peru, is a plant of such stature and talnesse (sic) that in one Sommer, being sowne of a seede in April, it hath risen up to the height of fourteen foot in my garden, where one floure was in weight three pound and two ounces, and crosse overthwart the floure by measure sixteen inches broad."

The generic name is from *helios*—the sun, and *anthos*—a flower.

—Photograph courtesy of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture.

