

Nature's Notebook Phenophase Photo Guide



Helianthus annuus common sunflower

Why Observe?

Common sunflower is a perennial, herbaceous plant that grows in dry to moderately moist areas. During the bud stage, these flowers track the sun from east to west throughout the day, a trait known as heliotropism. Common sunflower is an important crop for the U.S., and the flowers are often pollinated by honey bees and native bees.

Tips for Identification

This plant typically grows 3-9 feet tall. The showy flowerheads have small reddish, brown, or yellow flowers crowded on a disk (flowerhead center) surrounded by large yellow petals.

Be aware there is variation from individual to individual within a species, so your plant may not look exactly like the one pictured. If you are uncertain whether or not a phenophase is occurring, report a “?” for its status until it becomes clear what you are observing after subsequent visits.



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[jim_keesling via iNaturalist.org](#). CC BY-NC 4.0 (cropped).

Helianthus annuus
common sunflower

Image Needed

email
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Initial growth

New growth of the plant is visible after a period of no growth (winter or drought), either from above-ground buds with green tips, or new green or white shoots breaking through the soil surface. Growth is considered "initial" on each bud or shoot until the first leaf has fully unfolded. For seedlings, "initial" growth includes the presence of the one or two small, round or elongated leaves (cotyledons) before the first true leaf has unfolded.



[mm-drhaus via iNaturalist.org](#). [CC BY-NC 4.0 \(cropped\)](#)

Leaves

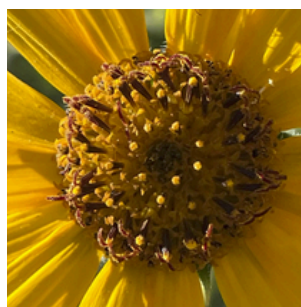
One or more live, fully unfolded leaves are visible on the plant. For seedlings, consider only true leaves and do not count the one or two small, round or elongated leaves (cotyledons) that are found on the stem almost immediately after the seedling germinates. Do not include fully dried or dead leaves.



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Flowers or flower buds

One or more fresh open or unopened flowers or flower buds are visible on the plant. Include flower buds or inflorescences that are swelling or expanding, but do not include those that are tightly closed and not actively growing (dormant). Also do not include wilted or dried flowers.



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Open flowers

One or more open, fresh flowers are visible on the plant. Flowers are considered "open" when the reproductive parts (male stamens or female pistils) are visible between or within unfolded or open flower parts (petals, floral tubes or sepals). Do not include wilted or dried flowers.



[Christopher Rodríguez-Moreira via iNaturalist.org](#). [CC BY-NC 4.0 \(cropped\)](#)

Fruits

One or more fruits are visible on the plant. For *Helianthus annuus*, the fruit is very tiny and seed-like and is crowded into a large spent flower head. The seed-like fruit changes from white or light yellow-green to gray or black, often striped with white, and drops from the plant. Do not include empty flower heads that have already dropped all of their fruits.



[Sandy Wolkenberg via iNaturalist.org](#). [CC BY 4.0 \(cropped\)](#)

Ripe fruits

One or more ripe fruits are visible on the plant. For *Helianthus annuus*, a fruit is considered ripe when it has turned gray or black, often striped with white, or when it readily drops from the spent flower head when touched. Do not include empty flower heads that have already dropped all of their fruits.

Phenophases not pictured: Recent fruit or seed drop