



## Harvesting and roasting sunflowers

Gardeners won't find them in dill pickle, barbecue or even pizza flavors in their garden, but the seeds from their sunflower plants still can be a tasty treat.

Harvesting sunflower seeds typically begins in mid-September and depending on the weather, can run into October. You can tell when the seeds of a sunflower are ripe because they begin to fall off the head. This is also when the birds may start munching on them.

Once the bright yellow petals begin to turn brown, cover the heads with a paper bag, cheesecloth or nylon netting to prevent seed loss. Secure the bag, cloth or netting with a rubber band or twist tie to prevent the seeds from falling on the ground.

Another option is to cut the heads off with about a foot of the stem still attached and hang them in a warm, dry, well-ventilated, and rodent- and insect-free location. Also, make sure the area has low humidity to prevent spoilage. Gardeners should do this once they observe a few of the seeds starting to turn the traditional black with white stripes. Although the flavor of the seed meat likely won't be as robust as those ripened on the plant, gardeners will endure less loss of seeds.

Once the seeds have dried out, they can easily be removed from the seed heads. Once removed, the seeds can remain viable for seven years when stored in a cool, dry and dark location.

For the sunflower seed enthusiast, roasting the seeds for a tasty snack is easy to do. To 2 quarts of water add up to one-half cup of salt. Add the mature seeds, bring to a boil and simmer for two hours. Another option is to soak the seeds in the salt water overnight. Drain the water and place the seeds on absorbent paper to dry.

To roast, put the seeds in a shallow pan and place in a 300-degree Fahrenheit oven for 30 to 40 minutes or until golden brown. Be sure to stir occasionally. Remove them from the oven and 1 teaspoon of melted butter per every 1 cup of seeds and stir to coat. Turn out on an absorbent towel. Add salt and other flavoring of your choice.

Sunflowers can be a double-duty plant in the garden by providing vibrant color in the summer and a delightful snack later in the season.