



BWSR Featured Plant

Plant Name: Maximilian Sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*)

Plant Family: Aster



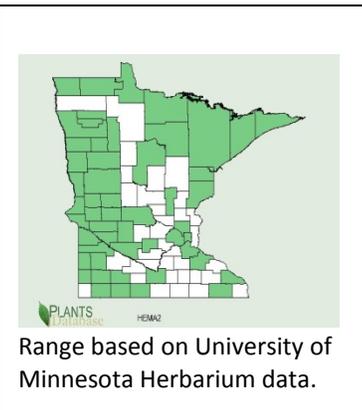
'Discovered' and named by Prince (and botanist) Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied Germany, Maximilian Sunflower is an important food source for pollinators, birds, and mammals. This native perennial can grow to be quite tall, up to ten feet in height, and provides a striking focal point in contrast to smaller native prairie grasses and forbs. These characteristics have made it a popular species for conservation, as well urban plantings.

Identification

Maximilian's Sunflower has tall, upright, hairy stems without much branching with the exception of where the flowers emerge. It has alternate leaves except at the base of the plant where the leaves are opposite. The leaves have white hairs on the surface and sparse to smooth teeth on the edges. The long, narrow leaves are folded and arch to a narrow tip. There are around 10-20 yellow ray florets on each flower head that emerge from a single stalk. The flower heads range from 2-3.5 inches wide and bloom from July to October.

Range

The species ranges across most of Minnesota, as well as Canada and the rest of the United States with the exception of nine states. It prefers full sun and mesic to dry soil conditions, making it well adapted to a variety of habitats including rocky upland prairies, loess hill prairies, rocky cliff ledges, railroad and roadside edges, and reclaimed sites. This sunflower does not seem to have problems with many pests or diseases and is resilient in many settings.



Uses

Primary Uses:

- Pollinator Habitat
- Livestock forage
- Erosion control

Given that the Maximilian Sunflower has an extensive rhizomatous root system, it does well at preventing wind and water erosion and is commonly used for bank and shoreline stabilization projects. It is also used in perennial gardens due to its prolific flower production.

The plant was used by Native American communities as dye, oil and thread, and the petals and seeds were used as a food source. Short and long-tongued bees, butterflies, and beetles consume the pollen and/or nectar of this sunflower, and many songbirds eat the sunflower seeds later in the season. It also provides forage for cattle later in the summer and the species is being studied as a potential biofuel crop.



Large clump of Maximilian Sunflower growing in a mesic prairie planting.

Planting Recommendations

Planting Methods:

- Broadcast seeding
- Transplanting
- Containerized plants

Maximilian's Sunflower is relatively easy to establish from seed, and with normal growing conditions it can reach maturity in about 1-2 growing seasons. Seeds are often planted in the fall to allow them to break dormancy over winter. The seeds should be broadcast seeded and then raked or harrowed so they are 1/4-1/2 inch deep where they have good contact with the soil and are less likely to be a snack for songbirds and rodents. Although the seedlings are vigorous, the plants will do better with some weed control. Plants can also be established through transplanting in early spring or late fall, or by containerized plants. Periodic prescribed burning will help improve the growth and seed production of plants.

References

Illinois Wildflowers: <http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/prairie/plantx>

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center: http://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=HEMA2

USDA Plants Page: http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg_hema2.pdf

Similar Species



Helianthus tuberosus (Jerusalem Artichoke) has wide leaves and relatively small teeth.



Helianthus annuus (Common Sunflower) is similar to garden sunflowers, but typically shorter and with smaller heads.



Helianthus Giganteus (Giant Sunflower), left, has a rough stem and upper leaf surface.



Helianthus grosserratus (Sawtooth Sunflower) is a relatively smooth stem and large serrations on leaves.