

Maximilian sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*)

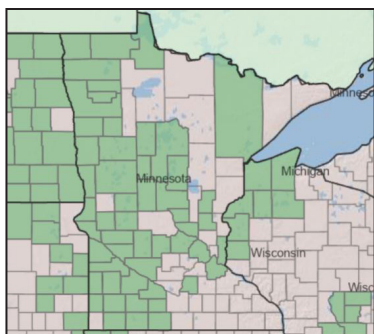
Family: Aster (Asteraceae)

DESCRIPTION: Maximilian sunflower is a native prairie perennial found widely across Minnesota. This tall, yellow-flowered plant blooms from August to November. It is popular among a variety of pollinators including long- and short-tongued bees, butterflies, moths and beetles such as **soldier beetles** (pictured).

USES: The plant was historically used by Native Americans for food, oil, dye and thread. Its edible seeds feed birds and small mammals in the winter. Butterfly caterpillars feed on the foliage; moth caterpillars feed on the stems. Rabbits and woodchucks eat young leaves, while mature plants provide forage for livestock and ungulates. Its deep roots help stabilize soil, making it useful in prairie restorations, erosion control and conservation plantings.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[NRCS](#)
[Illinois Wildflowers](#)



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



Planting Recommendations

Maximilian sunflower tolerates a wide range of soils, but prefers moist, clay-like soils and full sun. Once established, low to moderate watering is recommended. If stalks droop before flowering, staking can help keep them upright. At the season's end, cut back old stems to encourage new growth. Most Maximilian sunflowers reach full maturity in their second year. Rake seeds into loose soil in late fall or early winter, covering them with 0.25 to 0.5 inches of soil. Alternatively,

seeds can be cold stratified for at least 30 days before planting. Stem cuttings can also be taken before or after flowering; replant and water them immediately. To manage the plant's height and prevent it from exceeding 4 feet, trim it back to about 3 feet in late June to early July. Since the plant spreads primarily by rhizomes, it may not be ideal for small garden spaces. Good companion plants include compass plant, purple prairie clover, false sunflower and coneflower.

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR

STATUS: GP: FACU
MW, NCNE: UPL

ID: Reaching between 3 and 8 feet in height, the plant's central stem is stout, round and covered with short white hairs. The lower leaves are long and narrow, reaching about 10 inches, while the upper leaves measure around 2 inches. The alternate leaves fold and arch to a narrow tip, and have minimal waves on the edges. Numerous flower heads grow on their own stalks, reaching up to 5 inches across and containing 15 to 30 deeply veined ray petals.

SIMILAR SPECIES:

Sawtooth sunflower (*Helianthus grosseserratus*) has more sharply toothed leaves, a longer stalk and a hairless stem. Willowleaf sunflower (*Helianthus salicifolius*) can grow up to 10 feet tall, with flowers measuring 2 to 3 inches across.

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Plant Photo Credit: Dan Shaw

Insect Photo Credit: Heather Holm