

# GARDEN NEWS

## SHISO

If you have ever been in Asia or a few special U.S. Asian restaurants, you may have come across the aromatic, spicy shiso (aka perilla, beefsteak plant, Japanese basil) in a sushi bar, where the green variety is often wrapped around sushi or used to garnish sashimi. Shiso may also be found in specialty or Asian markets, but since the large crepe-like leaves with jagged edges are very delicate and don't store long, it can be an expensive purchase at the grocery store. Like many other "specialty" foods, though, shiso is easy to grow yourself and a few shiso plants added to your garden will keep you well-supplied with gourmet flavor all summer.



We grow a Green Shiso and Red Shiso (*Perilla laciniata*). Either of these versatile varieties can be added to an herb or salad garden, or just enjoyed as an ornamental foliage plant. Red shiso tastes a bit like anise and is often pickled or used to color other foods (think of the little pink heap of pickled ginger served as a palate cleanser with sushi plates). Green shiso has a more citrusy, cinnamon-like flavor, with whole leaves used to wrap sushi and tempura, or chopped to add a spicy-sweet pungence to salads, spreads, and stirfries. Either variety makes an attractive and flavorful garnish to grilled meats, vegetable platters, or tropical fruit salads. Like many other nutritious greens, shiso is especially rich in calcium and iron.



In the garden, place the plants 12-18 inches apart in moist well-drained soil where they will receive lots of sunshine. They will grow very quickly, especially in hot moist conditions, and you can pinch off their tops to keep them neat and compact. To harvest shiso for culinary use, either take a few leaves as needed or harvest the entire plant at once. Store them as you would other fresh herbs or lettuce: harvest them early in the day while it's still cool; wrap unwashed leaves in a plastic bag or moist paper towel; and keep in the crisper drawer of the fridge for up to 4 days.

For more on Green Shiso, including several recipes, [visit our handout](#).

## SUNFLOWERS

It's time! Take advantage of a warm sunny week and plant a row or two of this most summery of flowers, a longtime favorite for its gorgeous rayed blooms. But the sunflower isn't just a pretty face; it has a long history of value to the human groups who have cultivated it. Native American people used the plants for food, medicine, dyes, and ornamentation for over three millennia. In the sixteenth century sunflowers reached



Europe, then Asia, and were adopted variously as ornamentals and important food plants. Sunflower seeds became a favorite snack food and sunflower oil a staple of Russian and eastern European cooking.

Every part of a sunflower is useful: leaves make good cattle fodder; stems yield a fiber that can be used to make paper; a yellow dye can be made from their flowers; the seeds are a tasty snack for birds or humans; seed oil is used in cuisine, herbal medicine, candle making, and soap making; and, of course, the blooms make delightful cut flowers.

In the garden, sunflowers are prized for their strong architectural presence. Tall varieties form impressive screens or hedges along fences or walkways. New, shorter types form brilliant clusters of color in beds and even containers. Many pollenfree varieties have also been developed which are designed for mess-free cut arrangements. We now grow nearly 30 different sunflowers, from ultra-dwarf to giant sizes; cut flower, birdseed, or edible seed varieties; branching types and single stems; in all colors from traditional brown and yellow to deep red and black, with a rainbow of peach, orange, pink, gold, white, and even green blooms! To see pictures and find out more about each variety, go to the [sunflower catalog](#) on our website.



The top priorities for growing sunflowers are warmth and sun. Plant them in a sunny site, preferably to the north or east of shorter plants so they won't shade them too much. They prefer deep, fertile, loose-textured, well-drained soil with adequate water, but will do fine in poor dry soils as well. Water them well for a few weeks until well-established, but don't overfertilize or they'll keep producing leaves at the expense of blooms.

For the best cut flowers, harvest the blooms just as they are opening in the cool part of the day but when flowers are free of dew and moisture. Place them in water immediately with ¼ cup 7-Up and the blooms should last about a week in the vase.

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