

Prairie Sunflowers

By LLOYD T. CARMICHAEL, Regina

"The Sunflower turns on her god when he sets
The same look which she turn'd when he rose."

So sang Moore, the Irish bard, fact, unfortunately, refuses to corroborate his romantic fancy. It must have been a poetical illusion, for I have watched these flowers for many years and have come to the conclusion that *Helianthus* does not turn its golden flower-face from east to west to follow the course of the sun god, but on the contrary, remains in the same position all day long.

The sunflowers are true natives of the prairie. Long before this country was settled, their golden heads beautified the autumn landscape in every direction. Lewis and Clark, our pioneer botanists, tell how they were treasured by the Indians, who saw in them not only inspiration for their sun dances, but a never failing supply of small oily seeds, from which they made their nutritious flour and their rounded loaves of bread.

Helianthus is truly a flower of the sun. Its name is very appropriate, being derived from helios, "the sun," and anthos, "a flower." I have selected for our consideration three species which I think are the most beautiful and conspicuous. They can be readily identified from photographs alone.

The first picture shows the Common Sunflower - *Helianthus annuus*. It is our largest species, the heads being as much as six inches across.

The stem is rough and the leaves are ovate and coarse. It is an annual, thriving best on heavy clay soils, such as we have around Regina. Cultivation has driven it to the roadside where sometimes it forms a series of golden hedges for miles and miles.

The second photograph is one of the Narrow-leaved Sunflower, sometimes called Maximilian's Sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*). This, like all our other sunflower species except the first mentioned, is a perennial. Fairly dense clusters of the plants are commonly seen in roadside ditches. They may be four, six or eight feet in height. Their very narrow leaves, often folding along the mid-vein, and their yellow disks are distinguishing characteristics.

I think the most beautiful of all our species is *Helianthus subtuberosus* - the Tuberous-rooted Sunflower. It grows as tall as Maximilian's, but in the moist soil of saline meadows. Its name is derived from its tuber-like roots. You will note that the leaves are quite narrow and pointed at both ends. They are stalkless. The disks are yellow. The flower heads—four or five of them are borne at the ends of long stems. Often two or three plants are sufficient to form as lovely a bouquet as can be found in any meadow.

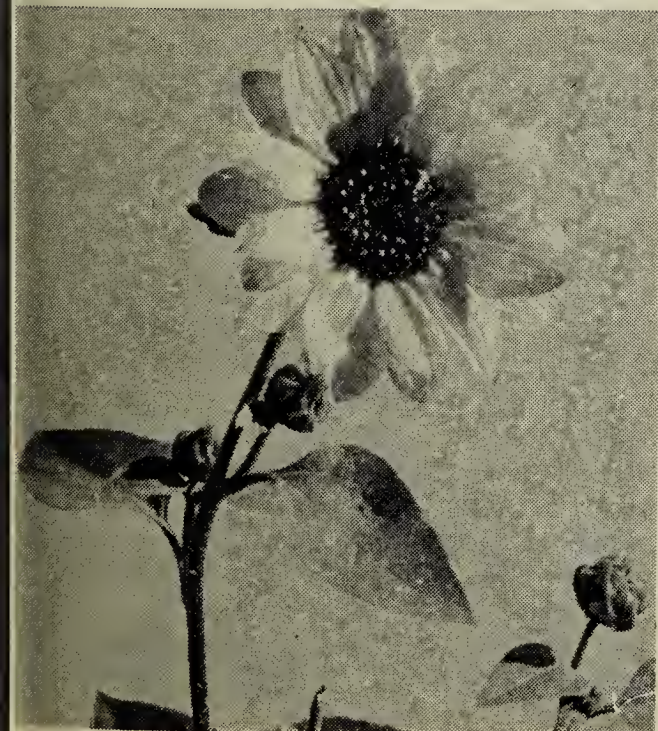


Photo by L. T. Carmichael
Common Sunflower, *Helianthus annuus*



Photo by L. T. Carmichael
Narrow-leaved Sunflower, *H. maximiliani*