

BWSR Featured Plant

Name: False Sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*)

Plant family: Aster (*Asteraceae*)

As is the case with other members of the aster family, a sunflower is not one flower but several in a head inflorescence. Disc flowers are in the center of the head with ray flowers around them. All are mounted on a receptacle that can be conical, as in false sunflower, or flat.

Courtesy Photo



A native, herbaceous perennial, false sunflower — AKA oxeye — is the first sunflower-like plant to bloom in summer. The name *helianthoides* means “like a sunflower,” referring to the plant’s resemblance to common sunflower and other species in the genus *Helianthus*. The common name “oxeye”

is shared with other sunflower- or daisy-like plants and may refer to the flower’s large, central disc.

Plant Stats

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:FACU

PRIMARY USES: Pollinator habitat, prairie restorations, native garden plantings

Identification

Stems of false sunflower typically grow 2 to 4 feet tall. Leaves are triangular, egg-shaped or lance-shaped, growing 2 to 5 inches long and 1 to 3 inches wide. The opposite leaves are coarsely toothed and lighter on the undersides, with petioles up to 1 inch long. The variety common in Minnesota has rough leaves with stiff hairs; an Eastern variety has smooth leaves. Peak flowering occurs June through August. The 1- to 3-inch-wide flowers are

erect rather than side-facing. Both the ray flowers and disc flowers are yellow. Unlike true sunflowers, the ray flowers of false sunflower are fertile. Each bears a forked pistil and later a seed. Rays are notched at their tips and remain attached to the flower head even after they dry. Below the flower head are two or more rows of bracts. The bracts in a row do not overlap, and the outermost row typically bends away from the receptacle.

Uses

The pollen and nectar of false sunflower attract many kinds of bees, butterflies and beetles. Its midsummer flowering season bridges spring and fall, making it a popular species in wildflower gardens or naturalized plantings. It is also a popular species for cuttings. Gamebirds, songbirds and rodents likely eat the seeds.



Ray flowers are fertile; they produce seeds. **Courtesy Photo**

Planting Recommendations

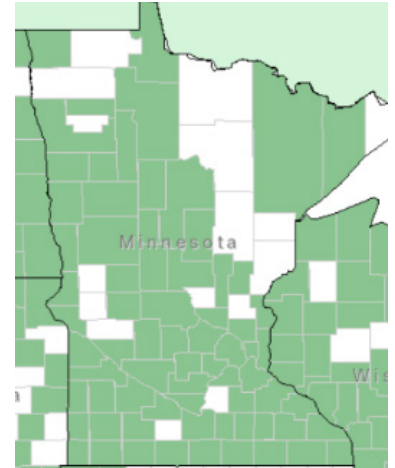
False sunflower is best suited to full or partial sun and moderately moist to dry soil. However, it will tolerate a range of soil types, and is

drought-tolerant. Unlike most forbs that require a winter to break seeds' dormancy, false sunflower can be sown in the spring

and will produce flowering plants the same year. The plant also can be propagated by division in fall or stem cuttings in spring.

Range

False sunflower is found throughout Minnesota in prairies, roadsides, fields, open woods and woodland edges. Its range extends across the eastern two-thirds of the United States and adjacent parts of Canada.



Range map source:
USDA NRCS Plants Database

Similar Species

To distinguish false sunflower from similar plants, look for blunt-tipped bracts below the flower head (compared to pointed rays), notched rays, a yellow disc, and coarsely-toothed, long-stalked, opposite leaves. *Heliopsis* ray flowers bear small, forked pistils — *Helianthus* ray flowers do not.



Left: Woodland sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*) has pointed bracts and rays with unnotched tips. **Right:** False sunflower has blunt-tipped bracts and rays with notched tips.
Photo Credits: Susan Nelson

References

USDA Plants Database: <https://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=hehe5>

Missouri Botanical Garden: <http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?kempercode=g520>

Illinois Wildflowers: http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/prairie/plantx/fs_sunflowerx.htm

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center: https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=HEHE5

Developed by Susan Nelson