



## ***Helianthus occidentalis*– Western Sunflower**

COMMON NAME: Western Sunflower, Naked Sunflower

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Helianthus occidentalis* - the name comes from two Greek words, *helios* meaning “sun”, and *anthos* for “flower” because the flowers tend to turn towards the sun. *Occidentalis* is from Latin meaning “western”.

FLOWER: Bright yellow rays with a yellow disk (center), about 1 ½ to 2 ½ inches across

BLOOMING PERIOD: Mid-July to late September or early October

SIZE: 1 to 4 feet tall

BEHAVIOR: This flower provides a bright color in the late summer landscape. There is a rosette of leaves at the base of the stem, 3 to 5 pairs of opposite leaves and then a mostly bare stem up toward the flower at the top. Sometimes this is called “Naked-stemmed sunflower”.

SITE REQUIREMENTS: Does best in dry to mesic prairies such as sand prairies, oak and pine barrens, roadsides and hill sides with sparse vegetation. Needs full sun.

NATURAL RANGE: Eastern tallgrass prairie region west to Missouri. Western sunflower is widespread in Wisconsin except for the Northern Highlands.

SPECIAL FEATURES: This is a good plant for holding dry soil and preventing erosion. Western sunflowers attract butterflies and many birds are attracted to the seeds. The 13-lined ground squirrel is fond of the lower vegetation and the rhizomes. Early Incas worshipped this golden flower as a symbol of the sun.

SUGGESTED CARE: These sunflowers spread rapidly if moisture is added and soil is fertilized. They spread by rhizomes as well as self-seeding. For propagation divide mature plants so that each division has a root and a leaf bud. In Wisconsin seeds sown in June can usually develop into plants that can be moved in one season.

COMPANION PLANTS: Coreopsis, bird’s-foot violet, lupine, Carolina rose, rough blazing star, and flowering spurge