

cuttings

EASY IDEAS TO GET YOUR GARDEN GROWING

sun worshippers

Artisan Kristin Nicholas loves sunflowers for their fast-growing nature, late-summer dazzle, and easygoing country charm.



WRITTEN BY DIANA DICKINSON. PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOHN GRUEN. PRODUCED BY KATHERINE WHITESIDE

With full, double blossoms, 'Giant Sungold' is one of Kristin's favorite varieties. They grow 4 to 6 feet tall, and 8-inch-wide blooms look like giant yellow puffballs in the garden.



It was a simple agreement. Mark Duprey could buy the one-acre field

down the road if he would grow sunflowers for his wife, Kristin Nicholas (*above*). Today, four years later, Kristin, Mark, and their 9-year-old daughter, Julia, grow more than 15 varieties of sunflowers in that sunny western Massachusetts field. “I’ve always loved sunflowers,” Kristin says. Besides being big, beautiful, and fuss-free, they’re super-fast growers, making them the perfect flower for impatient kids. “In the heat of summer, I swear they can grow a foot in one day,” Kristin says.

While she and Mark grow their sunflowers in a field, it’s easy to add them to smaller gardens by planting in back borders or along a fence or wall. For best results, plant in early summer, not spring. “I plant my seeds in June,” Kristin says. “It’s hard to wait, but they really thrive in the heat.” Kristin also thins out sunflower seedlings so there’s a foot between plants to “give ‘em elbow room.”

By late summer, the family is shoulder deep in a sea of sunflowers. Then, in the late afternoon, they cut buckets and buckets of sunflowers and put them for sale—via the honor system—on an old hayrack by the side of road. In the morning, the sunflowers are gone and the lockbox is brimming with change. “We never actually see anyone buy the flowers, so we call them our ‘sunflower fairies.’”

TO SEE KRISTIN NICHOLAS’ WORK AS A DECORATIVE ARTIST, KNITWEAR DESIGNER, AND AUTHOR, VISIT HER WEB SITE AT KRISTINNICHOLAS.COM.



Kristin’s Picks

1. Valentine sunflowers have smaller (5 to 6 inches), pale lemon-yellow flowers with dark brown disks that are perfect for big bouquets.

2. Multi-branching **Autumn Beauty** blooms in stunning bright yellow, bronze, and purple-crimson shades.

3. Sunbeam boasts pollenless flowers with golden yellow rays and chartreuse disks.

TO BUY SUNFLOWERS, VISIT JOHNNYSEEDS.COM.