



Useful sunflowers!

Display boxes about the uses of sunflowers



Some African families that have been helped by Send a Cow grow sunflowers on their land.

They make use of them in lots of interesting ways:

SEED SQUASHING!

For some people in African countries, buying cooking oil in containers like we might use is far too expensive. So, many farmers are starting to grow sunflowers. Why? They cut the flower heads off and crush the seeds on a machine called a 'yenga press' to make their own sunflower oil!

They can then use or sell this cooking oil in small containers or bags, giving them extra money to buy household items. A small field can give them about 70 kilograms of seeds, making 20 litres of oil!

QUICK FACTS

- Sunflowers got their name because the flower heads follow the movement of the sun through the sky, facing east in the morning and moving to face west in the afternoon.
- The tallest sunflower was 25 feet tall and was grown in the Netherlands.
- Sunflower heads consist of about 2,000 individual flowers joined together by a base. The large petals on a sunflower head are individual ray flowers.
- Sunflower seeds are rich in Omega 6 fatty acids. In fact, sunflower seeds have more Omega-6 than other seeds like pumpkin, sesame seeds and pine nuts.

FUEL WOOD

Most people in African countries cook their food on small wood-burning stoves or open fires - this means having to collect lots of firewood. In fact, 90% of Africans use wood for cooking!

Dried out sunflower stalks can be used as fuel to get stoves burning, which can save local trees and bushes from being cut down. But the ash from burning these stalks is the most valuable resource, as it can be used as a highly potash rich fertilizer to give great vegetables.

COW CAKE!

After pressing sunflower seeds, the leftover shells can be moulded into a 'cake' or a kind of biscuit to feed to cows, chickens and pigs. They can be expensive to buy and so making them might be a farmer's only choice.

These shells are high in energy and contain about 40% protein – so they provide the animals with important nutrients. A family's cow fed on these cakes will produce more milk, their pigs grow fatter, and their chickens lay more and bigger eggs. And children can eat some types of sunflower seeds as a highly nutritious snack!

CHOP AND DIG

When seeds from a plot of sunflowers are harvested, the stalks and leaves are then cut up and dug into the soil as rich compost – which helps to 'feed' the soil and keep moisture in the ground. This means that less water is needed for crops and rainwater stays in the ground for longer.

The sunflower stems and leaves can also be used as a surface 'mulch', which means that they are spread over the ground around plants to stop water from evaporating in the hot sunshine.

FEED THE LAND

A sunflower variety called 'Tithonia' or Mexican Sunflower, grows wild in some African countries and can add lots of nutrients into the ground such as nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous. They can be left to grow on poor soil and then cut up and added into the ground, this prepares the soil for new plants and helps important crops like sweetcorn and millet to grow really well. Tithonia leaves can also be soaked in a special 'plant tea', that helps vegetables grow better – and sunflower oil is also used in this mix to help the 'tea' stick to the plant's leaves.

Sunflowers in Africa



Mahase Liphoto from Lesotho mixes sunflower seeds with maize to feed his Send a Cow chickens.