

## Maximilian Sunflower: An Ornamental and Pasture Plant for Landscapes and Palatable for Livestock

A native, perennial, warm-season forb called Maximilian sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*) may beautify a homeowner's yard with its bright yellow flowers in early fall. It can also be eaten by all classes of livestock on a landowner's grassy pasture in early spring, and is also useful for wildlife by providing food and cover in both areas, such as in the yard and pasture.

Maximilian sunflower is an upright, tall, leafy plant with rough leaves and stems, which produces bright yellow flowers on almost the entire plant. This plant can stand between 3-10 feet tall with several stems from the base, along with alternate narrow leaves, stalkless, and tapered at both ends. The sunflower head is three inches wide from short-stalked and terminal leaf axils, and bright yellow disk flowers.

The Maximilian sunflower was named for Prince Maximilian Alexander Philip, who made scientific explorations in North America during the 1830's. The Maximilian sunflowers can catch your eye with its bright yellow sunflowers that are visible almost on the entire plant, which grows in low-lying areas next to culverts and ditches along the highways throughout Texas and Oklahoma. The Maximilian sunflower is not as common as the other sunflowers such as the *Helianthus annuus*, the largest and best-known annual plant species.

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), James E. 'Bud' Smith Plant Materials Center (PMC) near Knox City, Texas, evaluated and released a cultivar type called 'Aztec' Maximilian sunflower. The 'Aztec' Maximilian sunflower released from the Plant Materials Program in 1978 is sold by commercial seed companies for various conservation uses including landscapes or pastures.

Moreover, the 'Aztec' Maximilian sunflower is adapted in Oklahoma and all parts of Texas except the Trans-Pecos. It is best adapted to areas receiving 18 inches or more annual precipitation, but responds to increasing moisture. It is adapted to most soil types, except where wetness or salinity is a problem.

The 'Aztec' Maximilian sunflower growing as a landscape plant may be used for screening, as a background plant or blend with the other existing colorful plants on a homeowner's yard. Consult with your local or area professional landscape designer for information on how this forb best fits in your yard. Growing 'Aztec' Maximilian sunflower to either beautify the landscape of a yard or in a pasture for food and cover, may benefit in the end.

'Aztec' Maximilian sunflower growing on a landowner's pasture are useful for wildlife food and cover. Several species of birds use the seed for food and the multiple stem growth for cover and deer, livestock, sheep, and goats readily eat the forage. The seeding rate for "Aztec" is ¼ to ½ pound per acre in range seeding mixtures while re-establishing range grasses. 'Aztec' seeded in spring will often flower the first year, but only if rainfall is sufficient in the duration of growth.

Contact your local USDA-NRCS office for more information on how 'Aztec' best fits your pasture management program. For more information on 'Aztec' Maximilian sunflower, please contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District and USDA-NRCS Service Center, or visit the USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Program web site at: <http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>.

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