



NOTE: All sunflower fields shot in Hungry Hollow on Schaupp Farms by Elizabeth Monroe and Douglas Nareau; Schaupps' Aunt Frieda's 1920s vintage home is in the background at right.

Sunflowers.

Or, as the French would say, Tournesol, or the Italians, Girasole. However we say it, these magical plants, *Helianthus annuus* to be exact, turn their heads to follow the sun when they are young. They are practicing *heliotropism*, a function of photosynthesis. In case you were wondering. Obviously I was! So, I went to good ol' Wikipedia (and then checked with a botanist friend!) and found out why they seem to turn when new, but not later when the heads are flowered. Before flowering, the upper leaf of the seedling follows the sun all day, but after fertilization, their heads are too heavy.

An annual, it belongs to "the family Asteraceae (Compositae), whose flowers are grouped into heads of large dimensions." Mostly cultivated for its seeds, "rich in oil (about 40% of their composition) the sunflower, along with the rapeseed and the olive tree, is one of the three main sources of edible oil." Still, virtually all of the Sacramento Region's \$50 million crop is grown for seeds, not their valuable oil.

Native to this hot and dry area, they not only do well here in the central valley, but they are now grown on about 40,000 acres in the Sacramento Region. Mostly these seeds are for large companies like Eureka and local Pioneer and Sun Field out of Chico, according to the Sacramento Bee article on July 16, 2011.

Living in the farmlands of Hungry Hollow, I have become fascinated by them, surrounded as I am by the ever-changing fields. The Bee article goes on to explain why the same field is not used more than once and why they are so far apart: the seeds from prior crops and the bees from other fields have to be kept away so they do not contaminate the current crops—a pollinating bee can travel about a mile, so the fields are carefully spaced.

My uber-farmer-landlord, Bob Schaupp, solved another mystery for me: why are there some rows plowed under between all the others? Well, it seems that once these rows of male flowers and the bees pollinate the more abundant female plants, they are plowed back into the soil, their job done. Ouch! Sorry, guys! But it is important to get rid of these plants before the wheat harvester-like combines come to take the target plants.

Happily, sunflowers are native to America, but the wild varieties are smaller than the giant hybrids that can grow up to 15 feet—or more! A symbol of many cultures, including Native American (Apache) in North America, the sunflower is also a favorite among artists—perhaps most recognized being oils by French painter, Vincent Willem van Gogh.

<http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tournesol>



Above, the male row between female rows is obvious; below, the fertile heads are growing heavy with seed and drooping; bottom picture was artistically shot by Douglas Nareau—giving van Gogh an impressionistic run for his money!

