

GROWERTALKS

Culture Notes

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Growing Native Perennial Heliopsis

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Widely native in the U.S. and Canada, the Oxeye sunflower grows naturally in tall-grass prairies, woodland edges and savannas in a range of soil types, but most often found in clay. With the enthusiastic and steady increase in the popularity of native plants—or in this case, selected seed strains—these are great additions to your perennial plant offerings.

The first in this series from Jelitto Perennial Seeds' breeding program is *Heliopsis helianthoides* var. *scabra* Burning Hearts, introduced to the trade in 2016. The bright golden yellow flowers with a red eye caught many

growers' attention. Coupled with purple spring foliage and a sturdy upright habit, it's been a popular seller.

Heliopsis Bleeding Hearts is a brand-new seed strain for 2018, garnering a lot of attention for its vibrant red orange flowers—the first heliopsis in the world without any yellow in the flowers at all! The flowers emerge scarlet red and develop to bright orange red in full bloom. The beautiful show continues, and as the flowers age, you can expect lingering washed tones of bronze and redwood. In springtime, the foliage is deep mahogany supported by eggplant-black stems.

These plants are easy to reproduce. If you have protocols in place for growing *Heliopsis Summer Sun* or *Summer Nights*, you're all set.

General information

Height and spread of a plant in an average growing season is 3.5- to 4.5-ft. tall by about 16- to 20-in. wide. Due to their nice erect and sturdy habit, plants in the garden will build a showy colony. The foliage does mellow to a bronze-green as the heat of summer envelopes the garden.

Soil conditions and pH

Bleeding Hearts, and *Heliopsis helianthoides* in general, like basic lime soils. They're adaptable, growing naturally in heavy clay, but can be found in shallow rocky places and areas of low fertility.

Cultivation

There are 235 seeds per gram; a general sowing rate is about 2 seeds per cell for a 72 tray. A 128-tray size is also

appropriate.

Germination

Keep seed in constant moisture (not wet) with temperatures of about 68F (20C). Seeds must be covered thinly. Keep in cooler conditions after germination begins—50 to 55F (10 to 12C).

Scheduling

Winter, late winter and early spring are the obvious best times to schedule this first-year flowering plant, though in controlled conditions, it can be sown successfully year-round. Seeds will germinate in one to three weeks and grow quickly from that point, so be sure to plan for supplemental light if started in winter. Allow four to six weeks from germination to transplant the plugs or cells. Cut back one to two times—once at transplanting and once again four weeks later to keep more compact.

Vernalization

No vernalizing is required for first-year flowering *Heliopsis* Bleeding Hearts and Burning Hearts.

Fertilization

This plant requires average fertility of about 150 to 220 ppm.

Other info

- Bleeding Hearts makes great cut flowers (ASCFG members take note!).
- Honey bees and many other pollinators use this plant for sustenance. Take a look at the nativity map on the USDA Plant website to see if *Heliopsis helianthoides* is native to your neck of the woodland edge:
<https://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=HEHES>.
- If you're a designer and working with plant communities, Bleeding Hearts would be a fantastic seasonal theme plant, growing in 4-ft. tall drifts and providing color from July through September.
- Plants will gently re-sow if flower heads are left to seed. Current trends in naturalistic gardening and plant communities encourage the winter presence of seed heads and the seeding around of species to form colorful colonies. **GT**

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