

SUNFLOWER HEADS

by Uros Fifolt

Uros Fifolt might not be a name you recognize, but he is a successful pumpkin and giant vegetable grower who lives in Slovenia, a little country bordering on Austria, Italy, Croatia, Hungary and the Adriatic Sea.

Last year his 1320 lb pumpkin finished second at the Mozirski gaj pumpkin weigh-off, the official pumpkin festival in his country of just over two million inhabitants.

But it was his sunflower heads that impressed the most. He had several finish over 25 inches, with his biggest being 26.2" (66.5 cm). That was the largest head recorded anywhere in the world in 2016, and it is possibly a European record, though we will never know as results in that class are poorly documented.



Uros Fifolt with the two largest sunflower heads

Fortunately Uros agreed to be interviewed by the GVGO and has shared some of his secrets which include things like eggshells, guano crap and coffee.

Where did you get the seeds from?

I got my first sunflower seeds in the EGVGA seed package in 2015. I got two packages and I planted the sunflowers just for fun. I measured

the biggest head at home and it was about 50 cm (19.7 in).

Last year, 2016, I planted about 40 metres of sunflowers. All my seeds came from Arif Khan of Great Britain. I was trying to set a new Slovenian record for tallest sunflower.



Posing with a row of large head sunflower plants

Do you start them inside and then put them outside (when) or start them outside?

I always plant sunflower seeds directly into the soil, outside. Important is that you don't do that too soon in the season. I planted this year's seeds on April 22.

Because I have lots of seeds, I planted seeds every 10 cm. When the plants start growing I thin them out. I leave the best and healthiest. Important is a distance of 70-80 cm (30 in) between plants. At the end I have about 25-30 sunflowers.

How do you protect the plants? Do you use poles to tie them to, or a cage?

The tallest sunflowers get a stick and I tie them to that. I protect the biggest heads with a net. If not, birds will eat all the seeds. I have sunflowers around my pumpkin patch.

What kind of fertilizer did you use and when/how much?

In October I add horse, cow and chicken manure to my patch. Next lime, Epsom salt, guano manure, eggshells, Nitrogen (Perka), Borax and NPK. During the season I spray a few times with algae. I also spray them against powdery

mildew and cut off all bad leaves. In July I add wood ash and coffee near the sunflowers.



Daughter Tinkara with a large sunflower head

Anything else you would like to share?

Last year my tallest sunflower (Arif Khan seed) was about 550 cm (216 in). This sunflower probably pollinated my giant sunflowers, so the tallest also had the biggest head of 66.5 cm (26.2 inches) diameter. That was the best result in the world in 2016. The second largest head was 65.5 cm (25.8 inches) and it was 450 cm (177 in) tall.