

Helianthus petiolaris

[Synonyms : *Helianthus annuus* subsp. *petiolaris*, *Helianthus aridus*]

LESSER SUNFLOWER is an annual. Native to central and western North America it has daisy-like (rarely yellow) reddish-purple flowers.

It is also known as Annual sunflower, *Hamnsolros* (Swedish), *Pikkuauringonkukka* (Finnish), Prairie sunflower, and *Slnečnica* (Slovak).

The flowers are pollinated by bees and flies.

Petiolaris means ‘with a leaf stalk or with a particularly long leaf stalk’.

As with sunflower women in the Hopi North American Indian tribe who regarded the ground petals as an ingredient in the yellow face powder they wore for the basket dance, and the whole plant was used to decorate flute priests for the Flute Ceremony. The tribe also took interest in lesser sunflower’s blooming – as an abundance of flowers presaged plenty of rain and a bumper harvest.

Among some of the Navajo Indian tribe the plant held an important place in hunting ritual.

Hunters sprinkled their clothing with a cold flower infusion to bring them good luck in the chase.

Records show that the Havasupai Indians not only made a butter by kneading the dried and ground seeds but they also sun-dried the seeds for food in Winter. Prepared in the form of a meal the seeds assumed the role of a staple food for the tribe.

The Hopi Indians on the other hand viewed the seeds as an important Summer bird feed.

The plant was a source of medicine for one or two tribes. Apparently the Thompson Indians applied the leaves either powdered or in ointment form to sores and swellings, and the Hopi tribe applied it to some insect bites.

In some North American regions lesser sunflower is viewed as invasive.

Unlike many of its close relatives little use has been found for lesser sunflower today locally except, possibly, as a forage plant.