



Alamosa Landscapes

Fun Flower Facts

by Marilyn Loser

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Our hard frost a couple of weeks ago took out all of our flowers. It's too early for me to think about next year, so I thought I'd look up some sun flower facts. Here goes.

Did you know that the parts of broccoli and artichokes that we eat are actually the flowers? The green florets on broccoli stalks are immature flowers. If left to grow, they open into tiny yellow flowers. The artichoke is an unbloomed flower, part of the sunflower family (Asteraceae), from the Mediterranean and the Canary Islands. It is one of the oldest foods known to humans according to oceanmist.com. Ocean Mist is headquartered in Castroville, CA, and is the largest grower of fresh artichokes in the United States.

The site also says the 'Artichoke King', Ciro Terranova (1889-1938) was a mafia member who cornered the California growing market and sent all of the chokes to New York City making a killing 30 – 40% profit. It drove the mayor of NYC to place a ban on anything artichoke. Apparently, the mayor lifted the ban after a week as he loved artichokes.

“A 2004 study by the US Department of Agriculture found that artichokes were one of the top vegetables in terms of total antioxidant levels,” according to the Washingtonian newspaper. They also contain vitamins C and K, magnesium, potassium, and folate.

And speaking of sunflowers (*Helianthus*), they are native to America. After 1492, the sunflower went to Europe, then onto Russian, and was then reintroduced into America from Russia according to Desiree Bell of the motherearthliving.com website.

Sunflowers were used to remove radioactive elements in Russia after the catastrophic nuclear accident in Chernobyl, reports Wikipedia. Some folks believe that the flowering sunflower heads track the sun across the sky. It is true that immature flower buds exhibit this behavior, but the mature heads point in a fixed and typically easterly direction. In our garden, sunflowers show this behavior so I plant them in the western parts of our yard so I can see the 'happy faces' as I walk around.

I found a number of websites that said sunflower stalks were once used to stuff life jackets due their good buoyancy. Sadly, I didn't find a reputable scientific source to verify this. I'm including it here since I love the idea and wonder if anyone out there has a reliable source so I can really say this is a fact! Let me

know – mmloser@adams.edu.

Speaking of flowers and sun, the name daisy apparently evolved due its resemblance to a miniature sun. In old English it is 'daes ega' which is thought to mean 'day's eye'. My favorite daisy is the Shasta daisy (*Leucanthemum x superbum*) which does very well in our garden.

Botanists keep changing the species name for many daisies. At one point it was removed from *Chrysanthemum* and reclassified as *Leucanthemum*, but now it's been changed back according to the sunset.com website. My most current edition (2012) of the "Sunset Western Garden Book" does list it as *Leucanthemum*. Is this similar to a "rose by any other name ..."?!

Nations, as well as our states, have flowers as emblems. Scotland's national flower is the purple-flowered thistle 'cotton thistle' (*Onopordum Acanthium*). That part is fact. However, there are at least two legends explaining the naming. One is that when Vikings invaded Scotland, they were slowed by patches of wild thistle, allowing the Scots time to escape.

Another, according to the visitscotland.com website, is that a "sleeping party of Scots warriors was saved from ambush by an invading Norse army when one of the enemies trod on the spiky plant. His anguished cry roused the slumbering warriors who duly vanquished the invader." The website reports that there is not a shred of evidence to support the account. The thistle is also the emblem of "Encyclopedia Britannica," which originated in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Some might wonder why this 'weed' is the national choice. According to Scottish-at-heat.com, "*Scottish thistles have delicately beautiful flower heads, viciously sharp thorns, a stubborn and tenacious grip on the land, and the defiant ability to flourish in spite of efforts to remove it. We think these physical attributes make the hardy and beautiful thistle the perfect Scottish Emblem, Don't you?*"