**This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at [www.ksre.k-state.edu/news/stories/2022/08/horticulture-harvesting-sunflower-seeds.html](http://www.ksre.k-state.edu/news/stories/2022/08/horticulture-harvesting-sunflower-seeds.html)**

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**It’s sunflower season in the Sunflower State**

K-State’s Upham shares tips for harvesting, roasting seeds

*By Maddy Rohr, K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. — It is sunflower season in the sunflower state and harvest is just around the corner, starting mid-September into October.

As seed heads begin to ripen, protecting them from birds is essential., said Kansas State University horticulture expert Ward Upham, who recommends covering the heads once the petals begin turning brown with a paper sack or cheesecloth and securing the cover with a rubber band.

“This will not only help keep the birds out, but will prevent ripened seeds from dropping out of the head,” he said.

Maturity is indicated by shrunken florets in the center of the flower disk, the backside of the head turning a lemon-yellow color and heads facing down. “The ultimate check is to pull a few seeds to see if they have turned black with white stripes, the typical color,” Upham said.

If there are empty shells, this usually indicates a lack of pollination earlier in the year, he added.

To harvest the seeds, cut the heads and place them in a paper sack, or leave a foot of stem attached and hang the heads upside down to dry. Cover the heads to prevent seeds from dropping as they dry, he said. Once the heads dry, seeds can be removed by rubbing gently.

**Roasting**

Prepare the seeds for roasting by removing the shell and covering with salted water (2 quarts of water to ¼ to 2 cup salt). Then, bring them to a boil and simmer for two hours, or soak in the salt solution overnight. Then, it is important to drain and dry the seeds on absorbent paper.
To roast the seeds, spread them in a shallow pan in 300 degree Fahrenheit oven for 30-40 minutes, stirring occasionally until they appear golden brown, according to Upham. Then, remove the seeds from the oven and add one teaspoon of melted butter or margarine.

If they are to be eaten immediately, Upham suggests replacing the butter or margarine with one teaspoon of cooking oil per cup of seeds and stirring to coat. Complete the process by drying seeds on an absorbent towel and adding salt.

Upham and his colleagues in K-State's Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden and yard-related questions to Upham at wupham@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.

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K-State Research and Extension local offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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