

Suncredible: Award-winning sunflower variety



Norman Winter/TNS

Suncredible sunflowers will also get visited by hummingbirds.

BY NORMAN WINTER
Tribune News Service

The National Garden Bureau has designated 2021 as The Year of the Sunflower. If you choose to participate, I have the plant for you: Suncredible Yellow, a new ever-blooming bush variety.

I wrote about this incredible variety in summer 2019, while I was growing it. In 2020 it exploded, winning 53 awards like the Perfect Score All Season from Oklahoma State University and Oregon State University, Louisiana Super Plant LSU, Medal of Excellence Greenhouse Grower, Leader of the Pack North Carolina State and Top Performer from Michigan State, University of Minnesota, Mississippi State, University of Georgia, Cornell and dozens more. It has truly captured everyone's heart.

Everblooming and bush habit are not two descriptors you would ever expect to give a sunflower, but that has all changed. If you haven't experienced it, this will be a totally new plant product for

you. It will reach 42 inches tall and around 36 inches wide in the South. The flowers are 4 inches wide and produced in abundance all season, bringing in bees and butterflies. Those of you with roaming deer populations can rejoice that this plant is typically not on the menu.

Your first thought might have been that sunflowers don't last that long in the garden. But this will simply not be true with this new breeding of our loved native Helianthus. It will thrive in just about any soil and will be riveting as long as you give it good sunlight. My advice: Plant a cluster of three, spacing your plants 18 to 24 inches apart.

Rockin Deep Purple or Rockin Blue Suede Shoes salvias would make a most thrilling plant partnership. I also have mine planted with an assortment of agastache or hummingbird mints. Suncredible Yellow will keep blooming whether you dead-head or not. In my garden I have clipped them off a couple of times.

The look screams cottage garden but will be simply amazing just mixed in with perennials and other annuals. Of course, those of you working on a backyard wildlife habitat will be pleased beyond your wildest expectations.

As great as Suncredible Yellow is, you will be thrilled at what is coming next year, Suncredible Saturn. It has the same bush habit, same rugged persevering performance, but the name Saturn says it all. Suncredible Saturn has yellow petals with a bronze red center.

Because of their bushy habit, they too will excel as the thriller plant in mixed containers, or look stunning as a monoculture plant growing with no partners. My son James is using them in horse trough-type containers, with Supertunia Petunias, Superbena verbenas and Luscious lantanas.

We as gardeners and pollinator lovers can give a tip of the hat to Proven Winners

for introducing new native DNA plant material that will thrive during the entire growing season, including the heat and humidity prevalent in West Georgia. While the heat turns the dial into the misery index, we will still be celebrating with blooms, bees and butterflies.

One last thing very worth noting is the Suncredible sunflowers plant's ability to give you cut-flowers for the vase. Every day I watch users on Instagram making arrangements out of roses, zinnias, salvias and coneflowers. Now we can all go out and snip our own sunflowers to add, too. This year it is Suncredible Yellow, and plan on adding Suncredible Saturn to your pollinator arsenal in 2022.

Norman Winter, horticulturist, garden speaker and author of "Tough-as-Nails Flowers for the South" and "Captivating Combinations: Color and Style in the Garden." Follow him on Facebook @NormanWinter-TheGardenGuy.

BISCUITS

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Chef Christian's Southern Drop Biscuits

Drop biscuits are heavier and more substantial than typical flaky biscuits. They are different, but no less delicious. This sweet recipe comes from the chef at a Cincinnati biscuit restaurant, which may be the best idea ever.

Angel Biscuits

These are the ones that have yeast in them, along with baking powder and baking soda. Not surprisingly, they rise especially well. Mild and pleasantly flavored, they are hearty and satisfying despite — as the name implies — being as light as an angel's wings.

FABULOUS BISCUITS

Yield: 12 servings
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon baking powder
2 teaspoons granulated sugar
1 to 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
1/4 cup melted butter

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

2. Combine the flour, salt, baking powder and sugar in a mixing bowl. Slowly add 1 cup of the cream to the mixture, stirring constantly. Gather the dough together; if it is still dry and crumbly, gradually add a little more cream until it holds together.

3. Place the dough on a lightly floured board and knead for 1 minute. Pat the dough into a square that is about 1/2 inch thick. Cut into 12 squares and dip each into the melted butter so all sides are coated. Place the biscuits 2 inches apart on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake for 15 minutes or until the biscuits are lightly browned.

Per serving: 148 calories; 8 g fat; 5 g saturated fat; 24 mg cholesterol; 2 g protein; 17 g carbohydrate; 1 g sugar; 1 g fiber; 226 mg sodium; 65 mg calcium
— Recipe from "Four Sisters Inns Cookbook"

CREAM BISCUITS

Yield: 8 to 10 servings
2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for the counter
2 teaspoons granulated sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 cups heavy cream

1. Adjust an oven rack to the upper-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Line

a baking sheet with parchment paper. Whisk the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt together in a large bowl. Stir in the cream with a wooden spoon until the dough forms, about 30 seconds. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter and gather into a ball. Knead the dough briefly until smooth, about 30 seconds.

2. Pat the dough into a 3/4-inch thick circle. Cut the biscuits into rounds using a 2 1/2-inch biscuit cutter or into 8 wedges using a knife. Place the biscuits on the parchment-lined baking sheet. (The baking sheet can be wrapped in plastic wrap and refrigerated for up to 2 hours.) Bake until golden brown, about 15 minutes.

Per serving (based on 8): 272 calories; 16 g fat; 10 g saturated fat; 50 mg cholesterol; 5 g protein; 27 g carbohydrate; 2 g sugar; 1 g fiber; 160 mg sodium; 143 mg calcium

— Recipe from "The America's Test Kitchen Family Cookbook"

ANGEL BISCUITS

About 24 servings
4 1/2 to 5 cups all-purpose flour
2 1/4 teaspoons (1 package) dry yeast
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
3 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup shortening, lard preferred
2 cups buttermilk

Note: This recipe needs to be refrigerated overnight.

1. In a large mixing bowl, stir together the flour, yeast, baking powder, baking soda, sugar and salt. Drop chunks of shortening into the flour; work in the shortening with your hands, two knives cutting across each other or a pastry blender. The flour will resemble grains of rice or smaller.

2. Stir the buttermilk into the flour; mix it thoroughly but do not knead. The dough will be wet and heavy, but it will become stiff and workable when it has been chilled in the refrigerator.

3. Place the dough in a greased bowl, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.

4. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees at least 20 minutes before baking. Grease a baking sheet or line with parchment paper.

5. Pinch off only enough dough to make the desired number of biscuits. Return the balance of the dough to the refrigerator or freezer.

6. Knead the dough under your palms for 3 or 4 minutes. Roll into a rectangle, fold into thirds and roll again. Fold and roll one more time. The dough should be about 1/2-inch thick.

7. Cut the dough with a cutter of the desired size and place the biscuits on the prepared baking sheet. Do not allow to rise (they

will bake up taller, but will taste doughy).

8. Bake on the oven's middle shelf for 15 to 17 minutes, until the tops are nicely browned.

Per serving: 176 calories; 8 g fat; 3 g saturated fat; 8 mg cholesterol; 4 g protein; 22 g carbohydrate; 4 g sugar; 1 g fiber; 193 mg sodium; 76 mg calcium

— Recipe from "Bernard Clayton's New Complete Book of Breads" by Bernard Clayton Jr.

BUTTERMILK BISCUITS

Yield: 12 servings
2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
4 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) butter
3/4 cup buttermilk

1. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees.

2. Sift together the flour, salt, baking powder and baking soda in a large bowl. Cut in the butter using a knife, a pastry cutter or your fingers, until the mixture resembles coarse cornmeal. Quickly but gently stir in the buttermilk, just until the dough holds together. Don't overstir or the biscuits will be tough.

3. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured board and knead gently with floured hands. Press the dough into a ball, cut it in half. Place one half on top of the other and press down. Repeat three or four times. Then roll out the dough to about 1/2-inch thickness. Cut rounds with a biscuit-cutter or glass, or cut rectangles with a knife. Place the biscuits on an ungreased baking sheet, leaving a little space between them.

4. Bake for 15 to 18 minutes, until the biscuits are golden. Serve warm.

Per serving: 140 calories; 6 g fat; 4 g saturated fat; 17 mg cholesterol; 3 g protein; 19 g carbohydrate; 1 g sugar; 1 g fiber; 170 mg sodium; 167 mg calcium

— Recipe from "Sundays at Moosewood Restaurant" by the Moosewood Collective

CHEF CHRISTIAN'S SOUTHERN DROP BISCUITS

Yield: About 14 servings
400 grams (3 cups plus 1 tablespoon) self-rising flour
35 grams (2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon) granulated sugar
3/4 teaspoon salt
75 grams (1/2 cup) lard or vegetable shortening
160 grams (11 1/2 tablespoons) frozen shredded butter, see note
1 cup cold buttermilk

Note: Place butter in freezer several hours before using. When ready to use, shred using a box shredder, shredding attachment on a food processor or even a blender. Place shredded butter back into freezer until you are ready to use.

1. Preheat convection oven to 405 degrees or standard oven to 420 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

2. Combine flour, sugar and salt in a medium mixing bowl. Add lard and, using your fingers, work into dry ingredients until it forms small pebbles of lard and flour.

3. Lightly toss shredded butter in with lard and flour mixture. Using your hands or a silicone spatula, quickly work butter into mix. Pour cold buttermilk into the bowl and mix until all ingredients are combined and there are no stray crumbs.

4. Use a 1 1/2-ounce ice cream scoop to portion out drop biscuits, gently packing the scoop so each biscuit is the same size. Evenly distribute drop biscuits on prepared baking sheet as if you are making cookies.

5. Bake 8 minutes or until the outside is golden brown (approximately 12 minutes in a conventional oven). Let cool 5 minutes before serving.

Per serving: 251 calories; 15 g fat; 8 g saturated fat; 30 mg cholesterol; 4 g protein; 25 g carbohydrate; 3 g sugar; 1 g fiber; 209 mg sodium; 27 mg calcium

TOUCH OF GRACE BISCUITS

Yield: 10 servings
1 1/2 cups Southern self-rising flour, such as White Lily, see note
1/8 teaspoon baking soda

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Hillary Levin-St. Louis Post-Dispatch/TNS



Homemade Buttermilk biscuits.

1/3 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon granulated sugar
3 tablespoons shortening
1 to 1 1/4 cups buttermilk, or 3/4 cup buttermilk and 1/2 cup heavy or whipping cream
1 cup all-purpose flour for shaping, see notes
2 tablespoons butter, melted
Notes: Not all White Lily flour is self-rising.
— If Southern self-rising flour is not available, use 1 cup national brand self-rising all-purpose flour and 1/2 cup cake flour or instant flour (such as Shake & Bake or Wondra), plus 1/2 teaspoon baking powder. If self-rising flour is not available, use all-purpose flour and a total of 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder.
— Do not use self-rising flour for shaping because the leavener will give a bitter taste to the outside of the biscuits.

1. Preheat the oven to 475 degrees and spray an 8-inch round cake pan with nonstick cooking spray.

2. Combine the self-rising flour, baking soda, salt and sugar in a medium mixing bowl. With your fingers or a pastry cutter, work the shortening into the flour mixture until there are no shortening lumps larger than a big pea.

3. Stir in the buttermilk and let stand for 2 or 3 minutes. This

dough is so wet that you cannot shape it in the usual manner.

4. Pour the cup of all-purpose flour onto a plate or pie tin. Flour your hands well. Spoon a biscuit-sized lump of wet dough into the flour and sprinkle some flour over the wet dough to coat the outside. Pick up the biscuit and shape it roughly into a soft round. At the same time, shake off the excess flour. Push the biscuits tightly against one another in the cake pan so that they will rise up and not spread out. Continue shaping biscuits in this manner until all of the dough is used.

5. Brush the biscuits with melted butter and bake just above the center of the oven until lightly browned, 15 to 20 minutes. Cool for 1 or 2 minutes in the pan, then dump out and cut the biscuits apart. Serve while hot.

Per serving: 200 calories; 7 g fat; 3 g saturated fat; 9 mg cholesterol; 4 g protein; 26 g carbohydrate; 3 g sugar; 1 g fiber; 120 mg sodium; 34 mg calcium

— Recipe from "CookWise" by Shirley O. Corriher

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