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Creating a sunflower trail: Nature lovers doing their part to beautify land

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The sunflowers along Sevierville Road at Nina Delozier Road are just beginning to peak. Landowner Carolyn Forster invites the public to take photos.

Tom Sherlin | The Daily Times

With cameras in hand, there are those who flock every summer to where Sevierville and Nina Delozier roads intersect — and landowner Carolyn Forster is more than happy to see them.

There are roughly 2 or so acres of sunflowers highly visible to passersby, and ample parking where many pull off to take a better look. Forster has put the word out once more for those enjoying the gorgeous yellow-orange flowers to come and enjoy the show Mother Nature puts on.

She has been planting the sunflowers annually since 2017, but back then, they were closer to her house and not accessible to the public. That's when she decided to move them a little closer to the road so more people could take in their beauty.





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A portrait of Dr. Kara Birdwell, a woman with dark hair and a purple top, smiling against a brick wall background.

Farmers Bill Beason and David Coppinger are the ones who do the planting each year. Forster said it was her neighbor who provided the inspiration.

Debbie Protzman initially sent Forster a photograph of sunflowers against the backdrop of majestic mountains. “I took it to Bill and David and the rest is history,” Forster explained in a text.

People come to take photos of children and multiple generations of their families. Pets are sometimes involved. Some are intrigued by the number of bees buzzing from flower to flower. Forster even allows people to cut some flowers to take home, but asks that each person take only a few so others can enjoy.

About 5 miles away, on Andy Harris Road in Rockford, is another sunflower patch beckoning visitors. It is the location of Foothills Land Conservancy, a nonprofit whose mission is to protect and preserve lands in this region, including farms. Outreach Director Elise Eustace said it was Forster who gave them the inspiration to do their own sunflower plantings this year. They have thrived, she said.

“The bees are going crazy, Eustace said. “The butterflies too. There are so many pollinators. It is a beautification effort but also a pollinator-friendly effort as well.”

In addition to bees and butterflies, birds like grosbeaks and goldfinches are attracted to the flowers for the seeds.

FLC planted their crop back in mid-June. The rows and rows of sunflowers were peaking last week, so the beauty is waning, Eustace pointed out. Now is the time to visit before they are gone. Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 26 and 27, the gates will be open until sunset each day for this occasion.

Eustace said six people with FLC planted 80 pounds of black oil sunflower seeds in an area of about 1 acre. Visitors are also welcome to cut a few of the sunflowers at this location.

There is even an event set from 9 a.m. to noon Friday, Aug. 25 at FLC. Tours of the sunflowers will be led by FLC staff who will also be conducting a bumblebee survey. It is free to attend, but registration is

required. This is a great opportunity for the public to learn more about FLC and visit the sunflower patches and native pollinator meadows.

The survey is part of the Southeast Bumble Bee Atlas, a science project aimed at tracking and conserving bumblebees in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee.

Eustace hopes others will latch on to these ideas of planting beautiful gardens that also serve as pollinators. "Maybe this will gain traction throughout our community and county," she said. "For next year, maybe we can find other places and create a sunflower trail. That would be great."

If you go

There are two locations the public can view sunflower fields in Blount County:

At the farm located at the intersection of Sevierville Road and Nina Deloizier Road, owned by Carolyn Forster. She recommends wearing closed-toe shoes. Visitors can pick a few sunflowers from back of property to take home. No fee required. Photos are encouraged.

Foothills Land Conservancy has planted sunflowers along its property at the Harris Farm, 3402 Andy Harris Road, Rockford. The public is invited this weekend to stop by and take photos and a few cuttings. Park at the barn, 3320 Andy Harris Road. No fee is required.

Register to participate in FLC's bee survey to be held from 9 a.m. to noon on Friday, Aug. 25 at foothillsland.networkforgood.com.

Melanie Tucker

