

Cut flowers
for farm
production:

Feverfew “Sunny Ball”



Contents

Introduction	3
Production	3
Pests and diseases	4
Harvest and post-harvest handling	5
Design applications	6
References	8

Cover photo: Feverfew blooms are small but bright. Photo by Kathryn Fontenot



Fall planted feverfew has time to grow large before the summer heat sets in. Photo by Kathryn Fontenot

Introduction

The feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*) Sunny Ball is a charming plant known for its showy, yellow ball-like blooms. This plant originates from the Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe but is now found throughout Europe, North America and Australia. Historically, feverfew has been widely recognized for its medicinal properties with references dating back to ancient Greece. The term feverfew is derivative from the Latin word “febrifugia,” meaning “fever reducer,” indicative of its traditional use in treating fevers and other health concerns such as migraines and inflammation. Research efforts continue today to explore potential therapeutic uses of feverfew alone and in combination with other botanical plants such as ginger. As with all herbal medication, seek advice from a doctor before taking any over the counter substances. There is some indication feverfew may decrease the speed the

human liver can breakdown medication and may slow blood clotting, increasing the potential for bruising and bleeding. Today, Sunny Ball feverfew is primarily used for ornamental purposes. The clusters of small bright yellow pompon flowers offer a delightful splash of color and attract beneficial pollinators.

Production

Feverfew can be transplanted into Louisiana gardens in both the spring and fall. However, we highly recommend a fall planting for Louisiana cut flower production. Fall-planted feverfew seedlings have an easier time establishing when the air and soil temperatures are cooler. The plants grow larger and produce flowers from spring well into summer. When summer temperatures rise into the lower 90s (F) the foliage and center of flowers begin to turn brown. A

spring planting results in smaller stature plants and reduced flower production. Seed is typically sown five to seven weeks prior to your desired planting date. When starting seed, ensure that the seed receives light to germinate. If broadcast sowing in trays, move the plants to individual cells two to four weeks after sowing. We recommend starting seed in 50-96 count trays. Harden off the seedlings before transplanting by placing them outdoors out of direct sunlight for three to seven days. A preplant application of a complete fertilizer is recommended. Fertilizer was applied at a rate of 300 pounds of 13-13-13 per acre for the spring 2023 planting. Seedlings can be planted 12 inches apart in the spring, and 12-18 inches apart in the fall, single drilled in the row. Trellising was not required for this crop. However, we do recommend planting feverfew in full sun with well drained, moist soil at pH 6.0-7.2. This plant requires

long stretches of sunlight during the day in order to bloom, therefore the fall-planted crop will not bloom until spring. For fall plantings, if temperatures drop below 15 F consider using a weather protection cloth to protect the plants. As temperatures begin to rise, biweekly low dose applications of fertilizer such as calcium nitrate will boost growth. Soils vary throughout the state and therefore making exact fertilizer and exact irrigation recommendations is difficult. We do recommend using drip irrigation with emitters set no further apart than 12 inches. Drip irrigation maintains soil moisture and is not meant to take completely dry soil and replenish all water. Therefore, we recommend daily irrigation simply to maintain a moist but not saturated soil. Overhead irrigation is not recommended as it enhances disease probability especially in rainy years.

2023 LSU AGCENTER SPRING CUT FLOWER TRIAL SUNNY BALL FEVERFEW DATA

Characteristic	Measurement
Average Number of Stems per Plant on First Harvest	4.5 stems
Average Stem Length	14.31 inches
Average Number of Flowers per Stem	12 flowers
Average Flower Width	0.74 cm

Data collected from five random plants per plot, four plots planted in a randomized complete design with 10 plants per plot, for a total of 20 plants collected for data analysis.

Pests and diseases

The primary pests observed in the LSU AgCenter plots were snails and slugs. Iron phosphate bait products can attract snails and slugs with their smell. These products can be applied along the row middles and are most effective when applied in the evening. Avoid applying these baits before rain or early in the day. Other snail and slug baits contain the active ingredient metaldehyde. This active ingredient is known to be toxic to dogs, affecting their nervous system. Therefore, we do not recommend using baits with metaldehyde if you have dogs near your cut flower fields or if you operate you-pick fields and allow customers to bring animals.

A second insect pest in the spring-planted feverfew crop was the cucumber beetle (*Diabrotica*

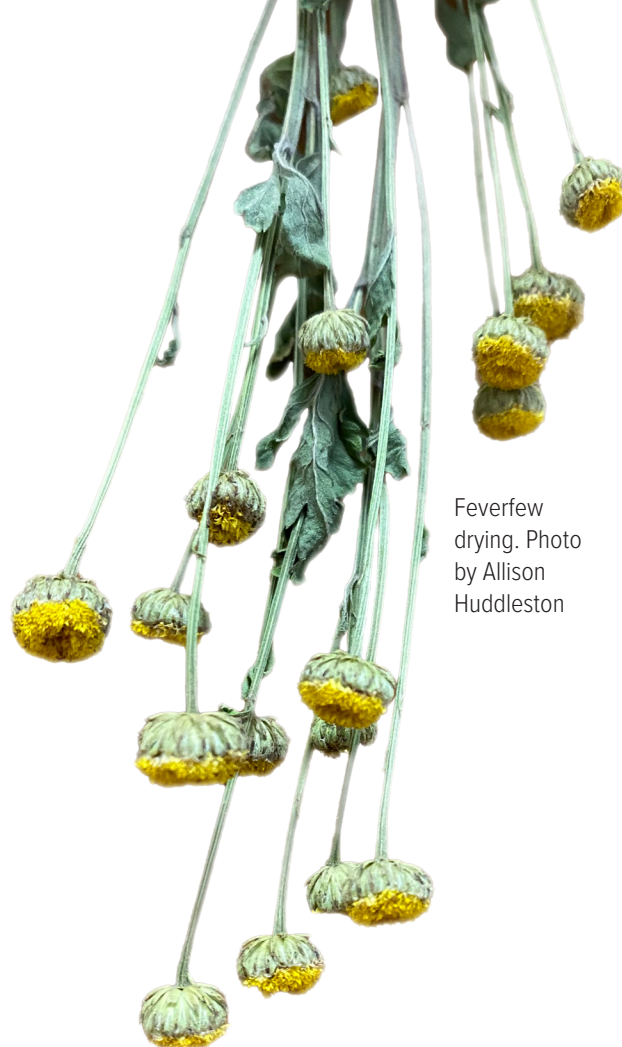
undecimpunctata howardi). We found the beetles chewing on the foliage. However, the damage incurred in the spring 2023 planting did not reach an economic threshold. Therefore, we chose not to spray the flowers since they do attract pollinators. The cucumber beetle was not present in the fall-planted crops until the summer when the flowers were fading. Biological control methods can be employed if cucumber beetles become a problem. Kaur Gill et al., 2020, recommends deploying natural enemies such as tachinid flies, soldier beetles and entomopathogenic nematodes. Cultural practices such as keeping cucurbit, beans and corn crops away from these flowers also help reduce populations. Organic control methods include using kaolin clay and spinosad products. Make sure not to spray spinosad when the plants are near or during bloom.



Feverfew grown in the spring suffers in the heat. Spring plantings are shown above. Notice the brown foliage. Photo by Kathryn Fontenot



Harvest feverfew when color is just beginning to show. Photo by Kathryn Fontenot



Feverfew drying. Photo by Allison Huddleston

Harvest and post-harvest handling

Sunny Ball feverfew yields upright, well-branched plants that have long, strong stems that produce ½-inch yellow clustered blooms. This variety is suitable for fresh and dried use. Harvest Sunny Ball stems when flower clusters are three-fourths open and the yellow color is beginning to show. For dried use, harvest when flower cluster is fully open. During harvest, bring buckets of water with fresh flower food solution to store flowers between the field and cooler. Multiple trips during the harvest to a cooler or air-conditioned facility may be necessary to extend vase life. Post-harvest cold storage will help extend vase life. The ideal cold storage cooler temperature for feverfew is 40 F (4 C). Noted in the fall planting, frequent harvesting increased the bloom period from spring into early summer. The spring-planted feverfew plants had one good harvest before the foliage began to significantly burn.



Sunny Ball feverfew harvested alongside lisianthus.



Fresh harvested feverfew in the early spring. Photos by Kathryn Fontenot

Design applications

Feverfew is an ideal flower for drying because it retains its color well after preserving. To dry these flowers, group several stems together and tie them using cotton or nylon twine at the base of the stems. Hang the flowers upside down for a minimum of seven days in a room with good air circulation. Using a room dehumidifier may help if drying large batches of flowers in an area with high humidity and poor air circulation. Limiting exposure to sunlight will also help preserve the flower color.

The bright yellow blossoms of Sunny Ball feverfew pair nicely in a bouquet with the royal purple blooms in the Double Mixture paper flower cultivar. This purple and gold color scheme is sure to please an LSU fan. To form the arrangement:

1. Remove all foliage that is browning or will be under water in the vase.
2. Separate the feverfew and paper flower stems at the bottom, removing any individual flowers that are too short for the arrangement.



Keep buckets of fresh water in the field to hydrate flowers during transport.



Feverfew adds a pop of yellow to early spring bouquets. Photos by Kathryn Fontenot

3. Cut the bottoms of all stems at an angle and place them in a vase alternating between feverfew and paper flower to form a gorgeous mix of the colors.
4. Add foliage as desired for extra color and texture. In the bouquets pictured, pittosporum foliage was added for its rich medium-green color. Zinnias, lisianthus and other early spring flowers pair nicely with fall-planted feverfew which blooms in early spring.
5. Adding flower food solutions to the vase will help retain clear water and extend vase life for fresh bouquets but is not mandatory.
6. Change the vase water regularly to promote longer vase life for your bouquet. At each change, cut a quarter inch off the bottom of the stems to promote better water uptake.

References

- Feverfew: Health Benefits, Uses, Side Effects, Dosage and Interactions. 2023. [Feverfew: Health Benefits, Side Effects, Uses, Dose & Precautions \(rxlist.com\)](#) accessed on June 20, 2023.
- Gast, Karen L.B. "Postharvest Handling of Fresh Cut Flowers and Plant Material." Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Service. 1997. <https://ag.umass.edu/sites/agcenter/files/pdf-doc-ppt/mf2261.pdf>
- Johnny's Selected Seeds. 2023. Sunny Ball. <https://www.johnnyseeds.com/flowers/matricaria/sunny-ball-organic-matricaria-seed-4335G.html> accessed on June 20, 2023.
- Kaur Gill, H., G. Goyal, J. Gillett-Kaufman. University of Florida IFAS. 2020. Featured Creatures. [spotted cucumber beetle - Diabrotica undecimpunctata howardi Barber \(ufl.edu\)](#) accessed on June 20, 2023.

Authors

Kathryn Fontenot, Associate Professor, School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences
Allison Huddleston, ASPIRE Intern, School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences
Alessandro Holzapfel, Extension Associate, School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences
Daniel Leiva, Graduate Student, School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences
Kirill Rozhentsev, Student Worker, School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences

Special thanks to Johnny's Selected Seeds for donating the seed for this cut flower trial.



Visit our website: www.LSUAgCenter.com