

# Boston

TRAVEL

## You Can Walk Through a Maze-Like “Sunflower House” in Vermont This Month

Forget sunflower fields. This summer is for exploring sunflower hallways.

by **MADLINE BILIS** • 8/6/2020, 12:42 p.m.



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Every year around this time, sunflowers burst into bloom. It’s a summery treat to visit one of New England’s sprawling sunflower fields, but this year, you can take your petal peeping a step further by walking through “hallways” of the golden blossoms at a “sunflower house.”

At Billings Farm & Museum in Woodstock, Vermont, Benjamin Pauly, master gardener at the nearby Woodstock Inn & Resort, has created a “house” with thousands of sunflower stalks. The 10,000-square-foot structure consists of more than 50 sunflower varieties—the towering plants form maze-like rooms, hallways, and meandering paths for visitors to make their way down.

“All over the Northeast there are corn mazes, but nobody has sunflowers that are designed to be like an architectural place to explore,” Pauly says. “Sunflower fields are so magical, but being able to walk through them and experience them close up—and feel enclosed by them—is a really fun idea.”

Pauly created his first sunflower house at the farm last year, and designed this year’s version with the coronavirus pandemic in mind. The house’s trails are all one-way, and are meant to be a social distance-friendly way to enjoy the season’s bright-colored bounty.

He’s planted the flowers in a range of colors, from light-lemon yellow petals to burgundy and “black magic” varieties. They’ll also range in height: Some will tower up to 14 feet tall, while others will measure as short as 18 inches. The house has been planted so that visitors will enter from the south and walk north—this way, they’ll always be viewing the south-facing blossoms head on. Hallways will create pocket views of the farmhouse and barn, and the front of the house will be accented by pumpkins, gourds, and amaranthus.



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To create the sunflower house, Pauly firsts maps out its design with graphing software. Then, he and his team plant thousands of seeds during the first week of June. He says it's remarkable to see the spot transform from a plot of dirt into a colorful living structure.

“Every week we go out there to weed and mulch, and it just blows us away,” he says. “Things have grown two feet from last week. Every week is just magical how it evolves.”

Pauly says the house will remain open until the first frost. Although the sunflowers will only stay in bloom through mid-September, he says the bare stalks and drooping sunflower heads create an entirely different—and worthwhile—adventure.

“It's just a unique experience—it's not like anything you've gone to before. Everybody's seen sunflowers... but it's more about a spatial experience where you're enjoying the outdoor space created by sunflowers,” Pauly says. “It's a fun architectural plant experiment.”

*Open August 6 through the first frost, Billings Farm & Museum, 9 Old River Road, Woodstock, VT, [billingsfarm.org](http://billingsfarm.org).*

<https://www.bostonmagazine.com/travel/2020/08/06/sunflower-maze-vermont/>