

PEONIES – AN AMERICAN GARDEN TRADITION

Virtually every American gardener has experienced the beauty and durability of peonies in their gardens; in fact, the peony is considered to be America's best-loved perennial plant.

Peonies possess every attribute a gardener could ask for: easy to grow, require little ongoing care, beautiful long-lasting blooms, lovely foliage, drought / deer / disease resistant, great cut flower and long-lived durability, many continue to produce good blooms 40 – 50 years after planting.

Planting and growing peonies is relatively simple, with a few caveats: first, choose a site with at least six hours of direct sunlight a day; second, make certain the soil is well-drained; third, allow approximately thirty inches of clearance between plants for good air circulation and lastly, always plant in early Fall to allow for adequate root development before Winter arrives.

The actual planting process will vary depending on whether you are planting a bare-root tuber or a potted plant. Once you have selected the site, the planting hole should be dug fifteen inches deep and twenty-four to thirty inches in diameter. Mix the dug soil with Canadian peat moss and cow manure; use a ratio of two parts soil, one part manure and one part peat moss. When planting a tuber, backfill the hole with the mixed soil, packing and settling as you go, to approximately four inches from the top, place the tuber eyes side up in the center of the hole and cover it with a maximum of two inches of the mixed soil. When planting a potted plant, carefully remove it from the pot and place it centered in the hole, make certain the top of the potted soil is level with the ground soil, then backfill with the mixed soil, packing and settling as you go. Water regularly until freezing temperatures arrive, do not over water.

Fertilization should be done in the Fall with a balanced 5-10-10 fertilizer, no more than two ounces per plant and also after the plants have bloomed.

Cut the plants back in late Fall, leaving four to six inch stems which can then be removed in the Spring when the new growth emerges.

Peony rings should be put in place before the buds form and then adjusted upward as the blooms open, this will prevent the stems from flopping over in the advent of heavy rains.