

Paeonia - Peony

Dividing Peonies

- The best time to divide a peony is September.
- Cut plant stems down to ground level.
- Carefully dig plants and shake gently to remove soil.
- Cut clump into sections making sure that each section has 3-5 eyes and a portion of the root system.

Planting Peonies

- Dig a hole 18" deep and 18" wide.
- Break up any large clods of soil and add organic matter if needed.
- Add ¼ cup 5-10-5 fertilizer to half the soil and place this soil in the bottom of the hole.
- Add soil without fertilizer to adjust the soil height so the peony division may be properly placed.
- Plant the peony so the eyes are approximately 2" below the soil surface.
- Water thoroughly throughout the fall and mulch with 3" of straw in late fall. Remove much when growth resumes in the spring.

Where to Plant Peonies

Select a sunny, well-drained location for your peonies. They will tolerate some shade, but should have at least a half-day of sunshine. The best blooms are usually found on plants growing in full sunlight. Do not plant near large trees or shrubs where they would be robbed of necessary moisture and nutrients. Plants can be spaced 2-4' apart according to desired effect in the landscape. If you wish to develop large

specimen clumps, space 4' apart. Some landscaping ideas include: specimen, grouped in massed plantings or a low hedge when planted in rows. Planting peonies with shrubs, perennials, bulbs or annuals will provide color and texture when peonies have completed their bloom cycle.

Fertilizing Peonies

If your ground has been properly enriched at planting time, there is little need for further fertilization for some years. The type of soil will determine the frequency. Porous soils lose their fertility faster than others, as it is washed out by the rains. Keep all fertilizer away from the crowns of the plants. Spread fertilizer from 6-18" from the crown where the roots are located and thoroughly incorporate it with the soil. Use fertilizer with discretion. Over-fertilized plants will produce too much stem growth and will not bloom. About a half cup of commercial fertilizer or one cup of bonemeal to a plant is sufficient.

Watering Peonies

Water your peony plants immediately after planting to allow the soil to settle around the roots. During the spring months, there is usually enough moisture in the ground for peony plants, but if several weeks pass without rain, water once every two weeks. Continue this watering schedule throughout the dry summer months after the peonies have bloomed to ensure a good crop of flowers the following year.

Winter Protection

Newly planted peonies require winter protection the first winter after planting. When the foliage has turned brown in fall, wait until the first heavy frost to cut the plants down as near to the ground as possible. Remove the old stems and leaves as a protection against disease. After the ground has frozen, cover with mulch, straw or marsh hay about 3" deep. This protects the plants against heaving due to alternate thawing and freezing. Remove the covering very early in spring. Established plants do not require winter protection.

What to Expect From Your Peonies

The first spring after planting, a standard division will make one or more stems six or more inches high. Do not be discouraged if growth is low and only one stem appears. It may bloom or it may not. Do not worry if it does not. Many growers do not allow a plant to bloom the first year. If you allow the plant to bloom, cut the flower as soon as it fades directly below the bloom. Do not allow seed to form. First year peony blooms rarely give a true picture of the variety.

The second year, the number of stems is usually double the number that came the first year. Growth is taller. If there are blooms, they are nearer normal. Cut all blooms immediately after flowering, with short stems. Some varieties take several years to produce normal flowers

The third year growth generally doubles that of the second year. Blooms should be normal in every way. Do not cut the stems too long. While the finest flowers are produced from plants 4-10 years old, many varieties have been known to give exhibition blooms for 20 years or more years. Plants that have been well cared for will even outlive the gardener.

Tree Peony

Tree peonies are dwarf, slow growing, woody shrubs. **Their branches do not die down in fall and should not be cut to the ground** as with herbaceous peonies. They should be grown and treated as a shrub. Given time and proper care, Tree Peonies will develop into spectacular specimens 4-6' wide and general 4' tall. Older specimens produce 50-200 blooms per plant and the attractive foliage is an asset to the garden landscape. They make excellent specimen plants and are also ideal for small garden areas and entryways.

In Zones 3-4, winter protection is recommended. Build a wire cage around the plant and fill it with leaves, straw or marsh hay. Wrap landscape fabric around the wire. This will protect the plant from

harsh winter conditions, but still allow air to circulate around the plant.

Fernleaf Peony

ZONE: 3 - 8
HEIGHT: 12 - 18 in.
SPREAD: 12 - 18 in.

Fern-like, green foliage provides a nice backdrop for the deep red, double flowers blooming early in the season.

Why do Peonies Fail To Bloom?

There are many reasons, but here are the most common:

- Plants are too young and immature. Let them develop.
- Plants are planted too deep.
- Plants have too much competition from surrounding trees and shrubs.
- Plants have too much shade which encourages tall leafy plants and no blooms.
- Too much nitrogen was applied which encourages foliage not flowers.
- Plants are undernourished. Buds show, but do not develop. Fertilize to add strength.
- Buds killed by late frost.
- Excessively hot weather.
- Buds attacked by thrips will turn brown and fall. Spray to prevent this.
- Ground is too dry. Water down to the bottom of the roots.

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