

PEONIES, THE SWEET WITCHES OF THE GARDEN: BY ELOISE ROORBACH



THE FRAGRANT MARIE JACQUIN.

THE shouts of praise to the God of Beauty that once rang through the classic groves of Macedonia, as men and women garlanded with flowers, wound their way to Apollo's shrine, find an echo in our land whenever we speak the name of our garden favorite—the peony. “Pæon, Pæon!” they ecstatically shouted, repeating that charmed name over and over again as they called upon him to imbue them with his own fair spirit,

or besought him to abide forever on earth. As we look at our beds of full-blown peonies, the fancy comes to us that the kindly God of Beauty must be keeping tryst with his worshippers, must be incarnated in some miraculous way in the form of these flowers that bear his name. These resplendent blossoms that perennially grace the earth, seem especially designed to reveal the presence of Beauty, to whomever believes in it and watches for its coming.

Though our peonies were christened with Apollo's name Pæon according to some writers, others assert that the genus Pæonia was named in honor of a mythological physician Pæon who ministered to the gods wounded in the Trojan War; still others assure us that it was named from the ancient island of Pæonia, where it was first discovered flaming like a fire across the mountain valleys. For in those days, before plant specialists gave it hybrid form and color, it was the color of sacrificial fire.

The Chinese call it *Hoa Ouang*, “King of Flowers,” and hold it in the greatest reverence, as symbol of the God of Heaven, exalting it as the Japanese and the Hindoos exalt the many-petaled lotus. The Chinese regard its pure white or glowing silken petals and gold heart as divinely beautiful and honor it in their poetry and in religious ceremonies as fit symbol of heavenly grace. They have brought it to a high state of cultivation, doubled its size, refined the texture of its petals, given it the exquisite tints of the rose.

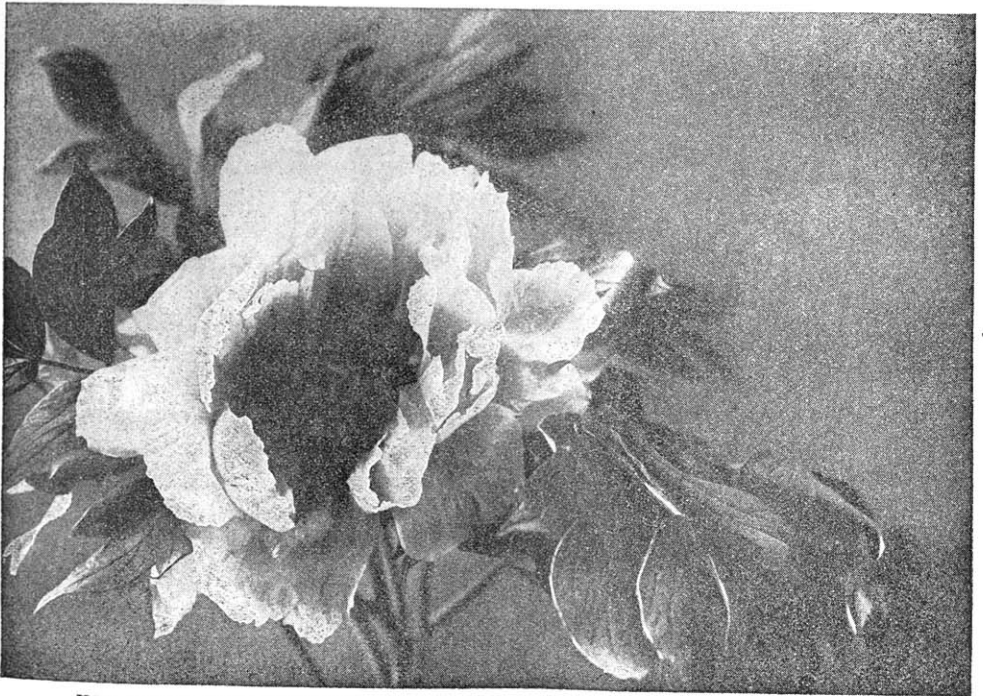
Spain says this flower is the “Rose of the Mountains.” Germany, with a most amazing, inexcusable lack of poetic imagination, calls it “the Gouty Rose!” Our New Englanders speak of it lovingly as the “piny,” and can pay no dearer compliment to their fresh, wholesome

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village maidens than to tell them they are as "sweet as a piny rose."

The old-fashioned single red peony has been in cultivation since the time of Pliny, but the peony as we know it in our gardens today is of modern development. The species known as *officinalis*, indigenous to Europe, is the flower of Greek temple gardens and was supposed to drive away evil spirits, avert tempests and bring good fortune to all who dwell within a radius of its perfume. Wonderful healing properties have been attributed to the acrid watery juice and the dried and powdered roots. The Spanish Californians still consider the root of *Pæonia Brownii*, the dark red, wild peony, a sure cure for dyspepsia when eaten raw. The Indians ground the dried roots into a powder and used it for various remedial purposes. Strange superstitions hover around this wild peony of the West, perhaps because it is almost black, an unusual, supernatural color for a flower. Witches might have touched it, they say, or the Evil One set the dark seal upon it. Troubled spirits like it well and demons obey its enchantments.

It is quite interesting to trace the origin of the popularity of our common garden flowers. In nearly every case they were first valued



HOA OUANG, THE CHINESE SACRED PEONY, WITH PURE WHITE PETALS AND GOLDEN HEART.

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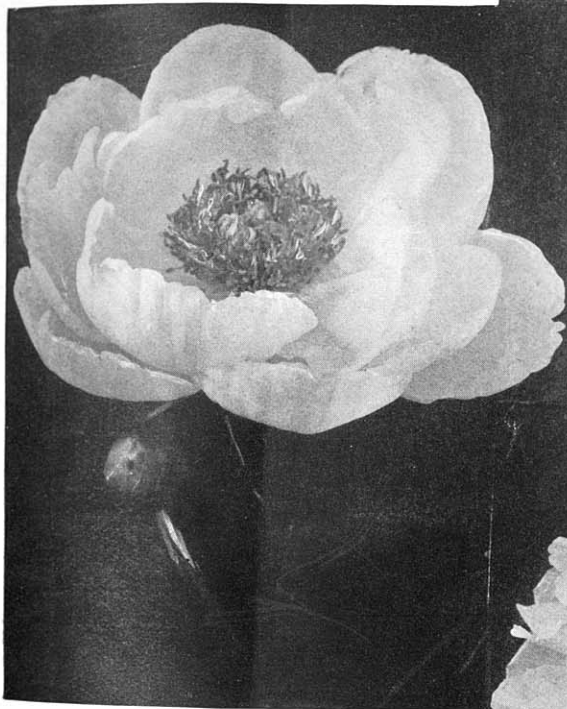
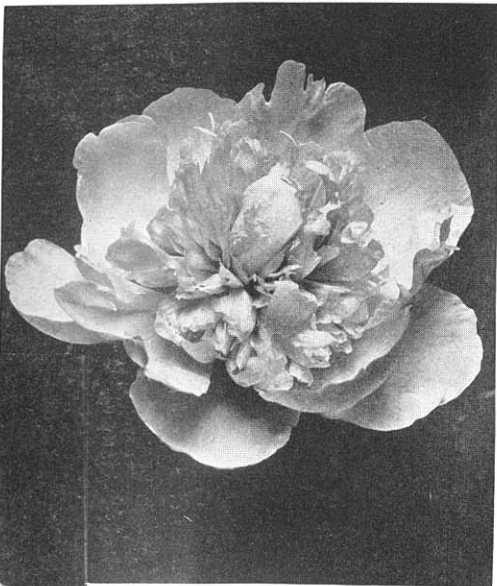
for their usefulness rather than their beauty, cultivated in gardens for their medical rather than decorative qualities. Miraculous as well as remedial powers have been attributed to the blood-red peony; demons were supposed to fly to the spot where it bloomed, and a bit of the root worn around the neck was believed to avert enchantment. "The ancient Greeks," so writes Dr. Coit, "when digging up the plant, were careful to do so at night only, as it was said that if any one attempted to meddle with it in the daytime the green woodpecker, assigned by the gods to protect the plant, would dart at the eyes of the intruder."

Now that the romantic days of witchcraft and superstition are at an end, the peony is being valued merely for its beauty—and is that not enough! No other flower takes just the same place in a garden-lover's affections. There is something so loyal in the way it blooms faithfully in long-neglected or deserted gardens, something so friendly in the way it rushes into its niche by the front door or its special corner of the garden at the first touch of the spring sun, something so democratic in the way it flourishes in the humble cottager's garden or a king's sumptuous park. It asks but little and gives much, making a brave yearly showing of gorgeous color once it has been given permission.

THE original form is quite likely the ten-petaled, white, cup-shaped peony with the clustered yellow stamens, that spread from China throughout all Europe and was brought to our shores by the early garden-loving settlers. The present diversity of color and form has been brought about by the crossing of *Paeonia officianalis* and *P. albiflora*—a sort of modern scientific version of the fairy story of Rose Red and Snow White! The primary red and white now runs through every possible change of rose-pink, flesh, salmon, lemon, cream and tawny reds.

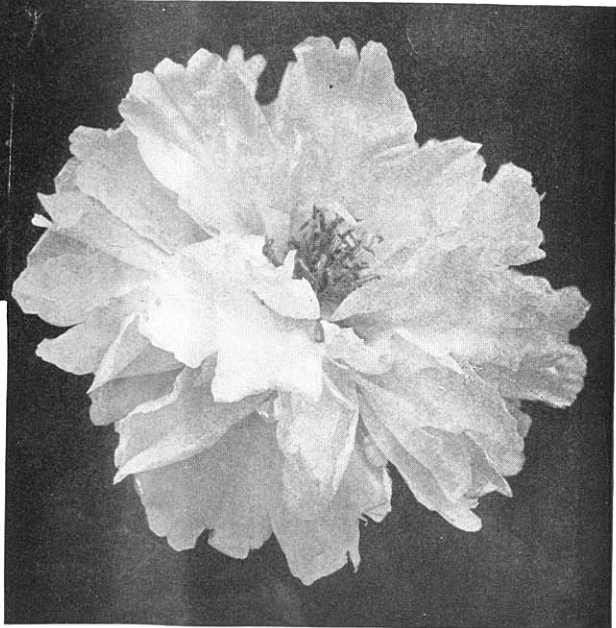
Peonies should be planted in the fall after the roots have ripened. By mid-September, the foliage is dry and yellow, showing that the roots have reached their time of rest. The plants should not be disturbed until the leaves lose their greenness, for until that time they are actively feeding the roots and developing the eyes from which the next season's growth begins. If the roots are removed from the earth while the leaves are green or the weather too hot, they will lack vigor and shrivel. The vitality of the removed root can be determined by an examination of the new pinkish buds or eyes as they are called which show among the roots ready to spring through the earth as the blossom-bearer of the next year. The best root is not one with many small eyes but one with but a few round, plump, wide-awake-looking

THE DUCHESSE DE NEMOURS AT THE RIGHT OPENS FIRST IN THE FORM OF AN EXQUISITELY SHAPED WHITE CUP WITH A LEMON-YELLOW CENTER: AS IT GRADUALLY EXPANDS ITS LARGE GUARD PETALS THE YELLOW CENTER PALES UNTIL AT THE PERFECT HOUR OF MATURITY IT IS A WONDERFUL CHASTE WHITE: THIS LOVELY PEONY OF CHAMELEON HABIT IS DELICATELY FRAGRANT, BLOOMS EARLY AND PROFUSELY AND IS MOST SATISFACTORY AS A CUTTING FLOWER: IT IS ONE OF THE MOST EXQUISITELY BEAUTIFUL OF ALL THE PEONIES, LIKE A ROSE IN GRACE AND COLORING.



THE MARIE JACQUIN AT THE LEFT WITH ITS LARGE OUTER PETALS AND QUIVERING GOLDEN STAMENS IN THE CENTER IS QUITE LIKE OUR NATIVE WHITE WATER LILY: IT HAS ALSO BEEN GIFTED WITH A RICH, LANGUOROUS PERFUME.

AN EXCEEDINGLY LOVELY PEONY IS THE LA ROSIÈRE AT THE RIGHT: LIKE THE OTHER TWO SHOWN ON THIS PAGE IT IS PURE WHITE WITH A YELLOW CENTER, CUP SHAPED, FRAGRANT, EXQUISITE: THE FLOWER IS DELICATE OF FORM, OF MEDIUM SIZE, GROWING UPON A BUSH OF MODERATE HEIGHT: ITS CLEAR GREEN FOLIAGE AND STOUT STEM TIPPED WITH THE CHARMINGLY GRACEFUL BLOSSOM MAKE IT A GARDEN FAVORITE AS WELL AS A SATISFACTORY ONE FOR INTERIOR DECORATION.

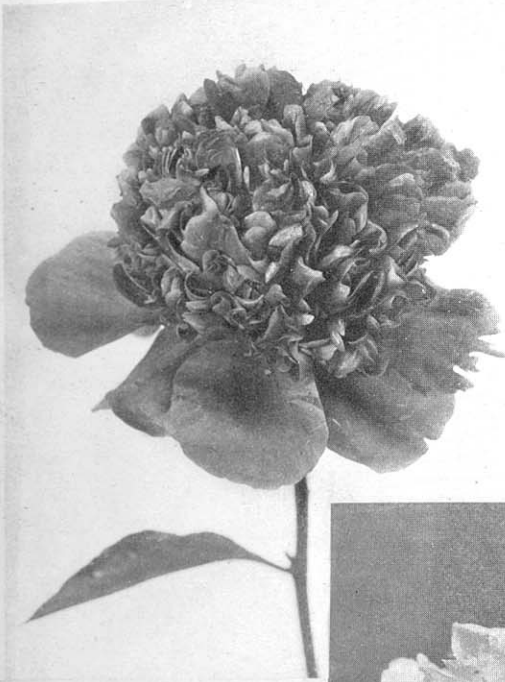




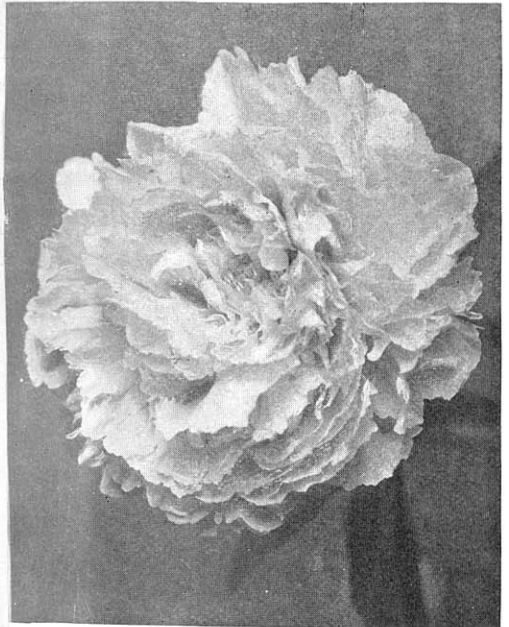
Photographs by courtesy of George H. Peterson.

PEONIES WHEN GROWN FOR LONG-STEMMED CUT FLOWERS SHOULD BE SET THREE FEET APART IN ROWS, FOUR OR FIVE FEET BETWEEN EACH ROW: PEONIES IN WELL CHOSEN VARIETY MAKE A SUPERB COLOR DISPLAY, ARE UNEQUALLED FOR WIDE PLANTINGS OF PARKS AND ROADWAYS, EFFECTIVE IN LANDSCAPE WORK, IN LARGE BEDS, AS INDIVIDUAL SPECIMENS AT THE EDGE OF A LAWN AND INVALUABLE FOR CUTTING AND INTERIOR DECORATIVE PURPOSES: EVEN THOUGH THEIR BLOOMING SEASON IS SHORT, THEY ARE STILL USEFUL AS BACKGROUNDS FOR THE SUMMER FLOWERING PLANTS.

THE BRILLIANT
 RED PEONY AT
 THE RIGHT,
 FELIX CROUSSE
 BY NAME, IS A
 GOOD BLOOMER
 AS WELL AS
 GROWER: ITS
 FULL, GLOBE-
 SHAPED
 FLOWERS ARE
 VALUED FOR
 MASSED COLOR
 EFFECTS: NO
 PEONY CAN
 EXCEL IT FOR
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 COLORING.

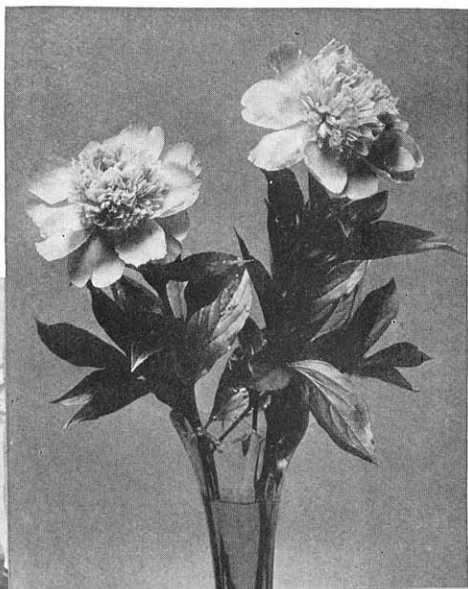


MADAME DE GAHLAU SHOWN
 BELOW IS A SUPERB LATE
 BLOOMING PEONY: IN COLOR
 IT IS GLOSSY FLESH PINK,
 SHADED WITH TRANSPARENT
 SALMON: THIS SHOWY PLANT
 IS OF MODERN DEVELOPMENT
 AS CAN BE SEEN BY THE
 CLOSELY PACKED PETALS, FOR
 THE ORIGINAL PEONY, FROM
 WHICH ALL THE GORGEOUS
 VARIETIES NOW SEEN IN OUR
 GARDENS HAVE DESCENDED,
 WAS SINGLE WITH A FEW
 LARGE GUARD PETALS AND
 INNUMERABLE YELLOW
 STAMENS AT ITS HEART.



ARMANDINE MECHIN AT THE LEFT IS A LARGE,
 BRIGHT PEONY, PERHAPS THE MOST BRIL-
 LIANT AND SHOWY PEONY IN CULTIVATION
 TODAY: IN COLOR IT IS A TRUE DESCENDANT
 OF THAT FIRST WILD FLOWER THAT FLAMED
 LIKE A FIRE ACROSS THE ANCIENT ISLAND
 OF P.EONIA: IN FORM IT SHOWS THE EXTREME
 OF HYBRID CULTURE POSSIBILITIES.

THE GENERAL BERTRAND AT THE RIGHT AND THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON BELOW ARE BOTH SHOWY, FINELY FORMED FLOWERS HELD ALOFT WITH MILITARY PERFECTION, ON LONG FIRM STEMS: THE GENERAL BERTRAND IS A DEEP, ROSE-PINK FILLED WITH SMALL SALMON-PINK PETALS EDGED WITH LIGHTER PINK: THE OTHER IS PURE WHITE.



MARÉCHAL MAC MAHON AT THE RIGHT IS ANOTHER PEONY OF STOCKY STRONG GROWTH, DARK GLOSSY FOLIAGE AND STIFF STEMS: IT PUTS FORTH AN UNUSUALLY LARGE FLOWER OF A BRIGHT RICH RED: ITS OUTER GUARD PETALS ARE VERY LARGE, THE CENTER PETALS NARROW AND RAGGED, BUILT UP HIGH IN THE CENTER, AN EXCEEDINGLY BEAUTIFUL PLANT, QUITE INDISPENSABLE FOR BORDERS AND SHOWY COLOR EFFECTS: PLANTED IN A SOLID BED IT MAKES A GLOW OF COLOR THAT IS UNSURPASSED FOR GORGEOUSNESS.

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buds. One-, two- or even three-year-old plants can be purchased which will make a satisfactory showing the following spring. But if the purse is small and the stock of patience large, a package of seeds will bring equal results.

These gorgeous herbaceous plants will good-naturedly flourish in almost any soil, in shade, sun or partial shade. Like every other living thing, however, they will only reach the height of their perfection if given considerate care. They will more than repay for a proper scientific planting. They are great feeders, for they put forth a strong stem, heavy foliage and a wealth of bloom within a very short time. The finest flowers are obtained by digging a bed two or two and a half feet deep, filling it with pulverized loam or garden soil mixed with well-rotted manure, the proportion being about one-fifth the bulk of loam. If only new manure is obtainable, it must be made fine, mixed with the soil with a flat-tined fork and thrown in the bottom of the bed. The best way is to start a new bed in the spring by mixing new fertilizer and soil together and turning it over every two or three weeks, giving the heat and rains of summer time to disintegrate and blend the bed. Peonies thrive best in a soil which is not too light with sand or heavy with clay, and in a well-drained position. Each root should be set so that the upper eyes are two or three inches beneath the surface of the bed, about two and a half or three and a half feet apart, or even more if space permits. Florists who plant for long-stemmed cut flowers set them three feet apart in rows, four or five feet between each row.

No water is needed when planted in the very late fall, for the plant must remain dormant until the spring rains awaken it. Then much water will help greatly, if applied to the roots but kept away from the leaves. Much watering, especially if an occasional feeding of manure water be given, will produce strong, vigorous growth of stalk, full glossy foliage and large richly colored flowers. The tops of the plants must be cut back each fall and thrown back over the roots to make a mulch. In the spring remove the coarser part, add fertilizer and spade into the soil, being careful not to disturb the new buds.

This beautiful flower with its blaze of gorgeous color, year after year is almost immune from disease. Few insects disturb it. The tiny ants which visit its buds when they first begin to swell simply drink the sweet sap which exudes and do not injure the blossom in the least. The plant needs no winter protection, for it is a hardy, independent garden friend well able to take care of itself.

Hardly a garden is without this hardy, dependable, easily grown and brilliant "herbaceous rose." Colors to satisfy everyone can be chosen from any reputable grower. Among the rarely beautiful ones

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may be found the General Bertrand of large rose-pink guard petals well-filled with small salmon-pink petals tipped with lighter pink, the buds finely elongated, foliage full and rich. The Duchesse de Nemours, another aristocratic beauty, has large white outer petals and lemon-yellow with greenish reflex, slashed centers. As the bud with its delicate heart expands, it gradually pales to purest white. It blooms profusely and exhales a rare perfume. The Duke of Wellington is quite like it as to form and habit of maturing its yellow center to a pure white. The stems are long and fine, making it a good flower for decorative uses. Glossy white, tinged with red is the full cup-shaped Marie Jacquin. The weak growths often are almost single with golden stamens in the center that remind one of our native water-lily—as lovely in this form as in the more vigorous double growth. The Maréchal MacMahon, a strong grower, is of a deep rich red upon opening and blooms until late, a trait that makes it a universal favorite. Felix Crousse is a gorgeous flower, with dazzling red petals guarding a ruby-flame center. The Madame de Galhau, a profuse bloomer of late habits, is valuable for border effects. Its color is soft, glossy, flesh-pink shaded with transparent salmon. La Rosière is another delicately lovely white peony with small yellow stamen center like a rose.

These are but a few of many marvelously colored American descendants of those first wild, sturdy, flame-red and snow-white peonies whose beauty filled the Old World with a spirit of reverence or of superstition. They fill our gardens with incomparable beauty, and our hearts with gladness. If color were translated into music, a peony bed would be heard shouting pæons of praise to the highest.



THE MARIE JACQUIN IN BLOOM.