

HORTICULTURE NO. 2

C. GUSTAV HARD

# Growing Peonies

Peonies are versatile perennials. They are excellent cut flowers, they provide color and bloom during late spring, and they can be used as a low temporary hedge. Because peonies survive cold winters, are rarely attacked by insects, and are comparatively free from diseases, they are easy to grow.

## SOIL AND FERTILIZER REQUIREMENTS

Peonies grow best in a well drained soil that is well supplied with nutrients. Choose a soil that is slightly acid (6.0-7.0 pH).

Since the peony develops a vigorous and deep root system, deep soil preparation is essential. Dig the hole 18 inches in diameter and 18 inches deep. Then place well rotted manure or compost and a cup of bonemeal or superphosphate in the hole. Cover this material with soil to the proper planting depth; water the soil thoroughly to settle the soil and organic matter.

## PLANTING

The best time to plant peonies is late August or early September. If you plant them in spring, a year's bloom is usually lost. When peony clumps arrive from the nursery, examine roots to see if they are in good condition. If they have dried out, soak them in water until they are firm.

Plant peonies in full sun. Do not plant them under shade trees or on the north side of a house.

Place the clump in the hole so that buds are 2 inches below the soil surface. To allow room for clumps to spread, plant peonies 3-4 feet apart. Fill in around roots with a good soil; then settle the soil by tamping and watering it. Proper settling of the soil is essential because peonies may fail to bloom if buds are more than 2 inches deep.

After the soil freezes, apply a light mulch of marsh hay or straw.

## CULTURE

Use a wire ring around the plant to help hold flowers upright when they are in bloom.

Grow peonies under clean cultivation. Do not let grass and weeds grow in the clumps. Hand

weeding and careful mulching help control weeds.

Each spring, apply a side dressing with a complete fertilizer. Broadcast one-half cup of a 4-12-4 fertilizer in a shallow trench around the base of the plant. Then water the plant thoroughly.

If you want large exhibition blooms, remove side flower buds. If peonies are a part of the landscape, leave side buds for an extended flowering season.

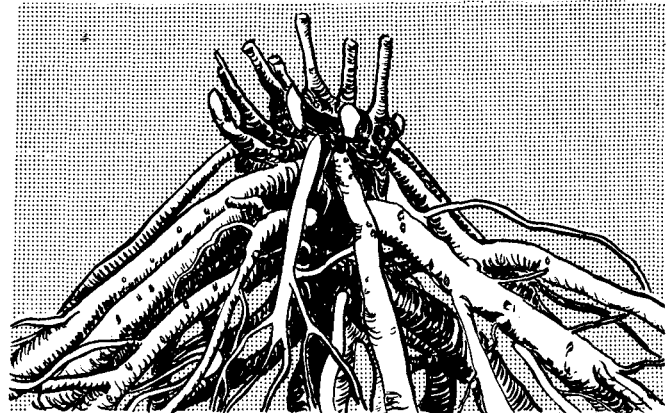
During drought periods, water peonies regularly to keep plants from becoming dormant. Additional water during the blooming period lengthens the period of bloom and enhances the flower size.

## DIVIDING PEONIES

You may wish to divide peonies because of poor flowering or to obtain more plants. Divide peonies in late August or early September. Do not cut tops of peonies until foliage turns yellow in fall or is killed by frost. Remove faded flowers after blooming so seed pods do not develop.

To divide a peony, cut the top of the plant back to 4 inches. Dig around roots on all sides and carefully lift clumps. Do not break side roots. Shake off the excess soil and wash roots with a hard spray of water. Then inspect roots for crown borer insects or for lesions which might indicate rot organisms. Discard any disease- or insect-infested roots.

Divide the clump with a knife or sharp spade.



Dividing a clump--old roots and congested plants often cause poor flowering.



Do not plant newly divided peonies more than 2 inches deep.

Allow from three to five buds for each new clump. Do not plant newly divided peonies more than 2 inches deep; plant new divisions as you would new roots.

#### INSECTS AND DISEASES

Peonies seldom have trouble from insects. Although ants often gather on flower buds, they do not cause damage. However, ants may help spread bud blight organisms. To control ants, apply 5 to 10 percent chlordane dust to the soil around the base of the plant.

Several diseases attack peonies during wet weather or when they are grown on poorly drained soils.

Phytophthora blight affects stems, leaves, and flower buds. Affected parts become dark brown and black and somewhat leathery. When stems are attacked near the soil line, the entire shoot may turn black and droop.

Botrytis blight affects stems, leaves, and flower buds. In early spring, young stalks suddenly wilt and fall over. Young buds turn black and dry up; flower buds rarely open. Affected leaves show large, dark brown lesions. In severe cases, crown and root rots may occur. In wet weather, affected parts are coated with brown, felty fungus spores.

To control these blights, cut off diseased stems below the soil line and destroy them. As a precaution, cut off all tops in the fall and burn them. Replace the 2 inches of surface soil around the affected plants with clean soil. Spray with Bordeaux mixture or ferbam in early spring.

#### VARIETIES

Peonies are classified according to their type of bloom. The single peony has five or more

petals around a center of fertile stamens. The Japanese or anemone peony has five or more petals surrounding a center of enlarged petaloid stamens that produce little or no pollen. The double peony has many rows of petals extending to the center of the flower.

The following are recommended varieties:

#### Single Peonies

Pride of Longport (peach pink)    Man-O-War (red)

Krinkled White (white)    Darkness (dark maroon)

#### Japanese Peonies

Hakodate (white)    Prairie Afire (rose pink)

Golden Dawn (ivory)    Red Bird (dark red)

Laura Dessert (pale pink)    Rashomon (dark red,  
yellow stamens)

#### Double Peonies--White

Mrs. J. V. Edlund    Avalanche

Le Cygne    Elsa Sass

Kelway's Glorious    Festiva Maxima

#### Double Peonies--Flesh

La Lorraine    A. B. Franklin

Alice Harding

#### Double Peonies--Light Pink

Hansina Brand    Sarah Bernhardt

Myrtle Gentry    Nick Shaylor

Minuet

#### Double Peonies--Dark Pink

Blance King    Souv. de Louis Bigot

Marie Crausse    Martha Bullock

#### Double Peonies--Red

Phillip Rivoire    Vic de la Marne

Mary Brand    Karl Rosenfeld

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Use of commercial names does not endorse those mentioned nor criticize those not named.

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