



PERENNIALS
AND
GROUNDCOVERS
GARDENING
SERIES



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Peony

In North America we call it Garden Peony, in Asia it is referred to as Chinese Peony, as the Chinese consider it **the king of flowers**.

The garden peony is classified as an herbaceous perennial that comes in a wide array of cultivars. In general they grow to 3' in height and 2.5'-3' in width, but this will differ with the variety. The leaves are oval to lance-shaped and deep green in color.

Flowers form in May and last for 7-10 days. They can be as large as 6" across on some cultivars, but more typical is 2"-3". They come in range of colors but rose-pink is pretty common. They often bear double blossom flowers, forming a cup-shaped bouquet. Many varieties have a very pleasing fragrance and attract butterflies. Though the flowers last only a short time the foliage is interesting during the summer.

Peonies need all day sun in Western WA in an uncrowded bed or border. Bed preparation should be #1 on your list of things to do. The soil on the west side of the Cascades generally needs some amendments such as sand, compost and the addition of new top soil to provide the deep, rich soil peonies prefer. Avoid manures unless worked into soil a few years in advance of planting peonies. Raised beds are best. Peonies can live many decades, so good soil preparation will pay off.

The Right Place

Start off in the right place - in full sun; in good, loose, friable soil and preferably in a raised bed. If the soil is too sandy, add amendments such as fresh soil and compost. Excessively sandy soil can sink peony roots and stunt growth. Clay soil should be amended with sand and compost and formed into a raised bed to facilitate drainage. Also, don't plant your new peony divisions under eaves or big trees (too dry and too much competition for nutrients) and don't plant too close to shrubs or trees.

The Correct Depth

Plant herbaceous peony roots 1/2" deep, presuming the uppermost eyes will not sink below 2" in loose, freshly cultivated soil. Plant tree peonies deeper. The graft should be at least 4 inches underground so the tree peony can start growing it's own roots.



April 2013

In fall the leaves of your peony will pale as the plant enters dormancy. By the end of November cut all stems at ground level and destroy them (do not compost, or you might be saving botrytis in your compost pile). In cold winter areas, all first year peonies should be mulched with clean hay, straw or pine boughs after the first freeze to prevent the ground from heaving. No mounds of pine needles or bark mulch over your peonies, please. Clear away mulches in early April.

Fertilizer

Any brand of time release fertilizer from 10-10-10 to 14-14-14 will do. About a level quarter cup or less for each well established large plant. Apply early in spring no more than once a year. Use fertilizer in moderation, strictly according to directions. Too much fertilizer stresses the plant, causes spindly growth or invites disease. There are tons of plant foods out there that somebody would like to sell you. On the other hand, some peony professionals would tell you that if need to add plant food to your peonies, you've got them in the wrong place.

Herbaceous peonies may not bloom the first year after planting and will take about three years to bloom profusely. Tree peonies may take even longer. There's no way to rush it.