

# Peonies



Prince Edward County



Advice Sheet

## History & Type

Herbaceous peonies are native to Japan and Europe. Tree Peonies are native to China. Tree peonies have been cultivated in China for 2000 years, at first for medicinal purposes, later for the beautiful flowers.

Itoh peonies are an intersectional cross of the herbaceous and tree types, first successfully bred in Japan in 1948 by Toichi Itoh.

Herbaceous peonies are soft stemmed, clump forming perennials that die down to the ground in

winter. Mountain or tree peonies are deciduous shrubs with woody stems. Itoh peonies are compact plants with attractive, bushy, deciduous foliage and colourful, large never before seen flowers. They are now being reproduced by tissue culture.

## Climate & Cultivation

Peonies are found in the northern hemisphere and require a lengthy, cold winter, with temperatures below 0 Celsius in order to bloom.

They are very hardy and long lived, fifty years and more, an heirloom plant

Herbaceous peonies have definite requirements.

- They need at least 6 hours of sun per day. A little partial shade will preserve the colour longer.
- They need a well drained site, not too deep, but wide, with well amended soil on the acid side.

- They prefer not to be moved...unless it's to a better site!
- They never need to be divided, but this is a means of propagation.
- Division should be done in autumn.
- When dividing peonies, try to have at least five buds to a clump for immediate reblooming.
- The buds or eyes should never be more than 1 to 1.5 inches below the soil surface.
- They should be really well watered in the first year and some phosphorus can be added to the soil to encourage root growth.

Tree peonies are expensive and slow to get growing. The beautiful blooms only last about 5 to 7 days. It is best to buy one three years old in a pot.

- They need a lot of space as a mature tree can spread to 5 feet wide and range in height from 3 to 10 feet.
- They need a minimum of 3 to 5 hours of sun per day.
- They prefer dry, cool weather.
- They should be protected from strong winds and heavy rain.
- They should be planted in a hole 2 feet deep and 2 feet in diameter.

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## Climate & Cultivation con't

- They are always grafted and the scion should be 3/4 inch below the soil surface.
- The hole should be filled up with good soil mixed with compost firmed around the plant and watered well.
- They need to be staked to support the heavy blooms.
- After blooming, sprinkle phosphate around the roots.
- For the winter, they should be mulched and shielded with burlap.
- Transplanting, if absolutely necessary, should be done in the fall.

## Pests & Diseases

Both kinds of peonies are relatively pest and disease free.

The ants that swarm over the peony bush are only looking for sweet sap and are not harmful.

Botrytis Blight can attack herbaceous peonies in wet springs, leaving gray-brown spores on stems and leaves, which should be removed and destroyed. Remove all foliage at the end of the growing season.

The whole plant may need to be destroyed.

Root Knot, caused by nematodes, is fairly uncommon. An infected plant will lack strong growth and flower slowly. Check the roots for drilled holes and tiny worms. If infected, dig up in the fall and wash the roots with a heavy stream of water.

Then divide the plant and

relocate it.

The Tree Peony can suffer fungal problems from wet weather. Treat with commercial fungicide.

Itoh Peonies have a high resistance to peony blight.

-submitted by Virginia Mitchell

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