
Herbaceous Peonies

Those peonies whose foliage dies back to the ground each winter are considered herbaceous. This quality separates them from tree peonies, which maintain woody stems and can grow 4ft.

Herbaceous peonies may be grown in beds, borders, and gardens by themselves, or with other plants. By choosing a mixture of early (early-mid May), mid-season (mid-late May) and late (late May - mid June) blooming types, you can have peonies in bloom for about 6 weeks.

For Best Flower Production

Peonies prefer full sun but will tolerate a small amount of shade. Good drainage is very important, particularly in winter. Do not crowd with other plants—they require plenty of room for robust growth and good air circulation (a three foot spacing is suitable). Avoid planting them in areas where there is competition from nearby tree and shrub roots. Any good garden soil is acceptable. Clay loam will produce a slower growth but better flowers than a light, sandy soil. Peonies should not be planted where other peonies have grown before.

Container-grown plants can be planted at any time. The best time for planting bare-root peonies is September through October or early Spring. If absolutely necessary, they may be moved anytime during the growing season, minimize cutting into the rootball and pay particular attention to firming the soil around the roots and watering in well after the move. Shading the plants for several days after transplanting is essential during hot weather.

Because peonies can be expected to live 15-40 years, good soil preparation is well justified. Peonies prefer a soil pH of 6.0 - 7.0. Dig a large hole and incorporate plenty of compost to enrich the soil. A sprinkling of superphosphate or bone meal in the planting hole will encourage root development.

Find the top of the rhizome (where the stems emerge), and plant with that point about 1-1½ inches below the surface, but no more than 2 inches. (Peonies that are planted too deeply refuse to bloom!) Water well and mulch around the plant to conserve moisture.

Feed peonies as their shoots emerge in spring with a balanced fertilizer such as BulbTone or FlowerTone. Stake large plants with peony rings. In future seasons, place peony hoops out early in the season and allow plants to grow up through them for a more natural appearance.

To reduce the incidence of disease, especially botrytis, always avoid overhead watering. Remove stems and leaves during Fall cleanup — do not compost them. .