

PEONY CULTURAL INSTRUCTIONS

Peonies are easily grown and have minimal requirements, but respond beautifully to a little extra care and attention by producing their best quality flowers. We offer the following suggestions so your peonies will provide years of enjoyment.

When To Plant

Peonies may be planted in September through November before the ground freezes. Spring planting is not as desirable because the plants begin their top growth before the roots have become well established. Fern leaf peonies are usually planted in August and September.

Where To Plant

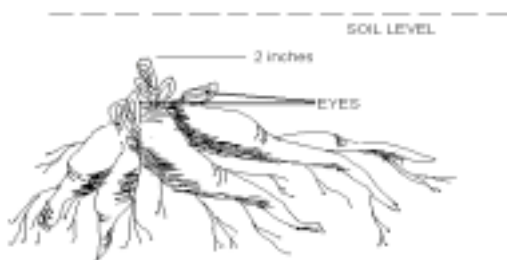
Select a sunny, well-drained location for peonies. They will tolerate some shade, but should have at least a half-day of sunshine. Do not plant near large trees or shrubs where they would be robbed of light, moisture, and plant food. If you want large specimen plants, space them three to four feet apart. Peonies prefer a soil with a 6.5 to 7.0 pH.

Peonies will grow in one location for many years and do well. Once a plant has been dug, do not reset another in the same spot unless you have removed/replaced the soil. Peonies use rare elements from the ground when they feed, and these elements are difficult to replace. In addition, planting in a new location will eliminate the possibility of peony diseases that could occur where peonies grew before.

How To Plant

If you can't plant immediately, keep the packing material moist and the plant cool. Before planting, remove the moss or other packing material from the roots. Prepare the soil before planting. For each plant dig a hole a minimum 18 inches deep and at least the same diameter. Heavy clay or very sandy soils should be amended with compost or replaced with good garden soil. If well rotted manure is available, use about three inches in the bottom of the hole, pack well, then cover with soil so the manure does not come in contact with the roots.

Depth of planting is very important. The soil below the plant should be packed well so that it will not settle. When planting is completed the eyes of the plant should be 2" below the surface. From mid-Missouri South, the eyes can be planted one inch below the ground surface. Planting may appear to be difficult, but it's a small task when you realize a properly planted peony will grow and bloom a lifetime.



Fertilizing

Fertile or properly prepared soil will require little fertilization for years. Sandy soils lose fertility faster since it is washed out by rain. Keep fertilizer away from the crowns of plants as it will damage eye development. Spread fertilizer 6" - 18" from the crown and incorporate it into the soil. Use fertilizer sparingly as over-fertilized plants will not bloom well. About a half handful of low nitrogen commercial fertilizer per plant is sufficient. Use a fertilizer mix with a NPK ratio of approximately 5-20-30 or 6-24-24.

Watering

Water peonies thoroughly after planting so the soil settles well around the roots. During spring months there is usually enough moisture. However, if several weeks pass without rain, water every two weeks. Water peonies during dry summer months after the peonies have bloomed to help ensure a good crop of flowers the following year.

Winter Protection

Newly planted peonies should be protected the first winter after planting. After the ground has frozen, cover the peonies with straw or marsh hay about 3" deep. This covering will protect the plants against heaving due to alternate freezing and thawing. Remove the covering in early spring. Established plants need no winter protection, with the exception of fern leaf.

Flowering

The first spring after planting, your plant will make one or more stems. Do not be discouraged by lack of flowers. This is normal. First year flowers may be true to color but not to size or form. Growth/flowering increases each year. Plants produce normal blooms by the third year.

Most varieties develop small lateral or side-buds near the base of the terminal bud. If larger flowers are wanted, remove the side buds so the strength will go into the terminal bud. Remove side-buds as soon as they are pea-sized by pulling downward and side ways. If you want, leave side-buds to prolong the bloom since they bloom later than the terminal bud.

Disease

Botrytis and other blights may attack peonies. In the spring, new shoots may suddenly turn black and die. Buds may turn brown and atrophy. The infection may spread downward on the stem and cause it to die and may even extend down to the roots. Leaves may develop brown spots, which spread and may kill the leaf. Spores from infected parts are carried by water and wind to other plants and are carried over winter in plant debris. Damp spring weather and poor air circulation tend to increase infections. Using fungicide sprays such as bordeaux when peonies are emerging in the spring will help. In the fall, cut foliage at ground level, remove and burn.