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How to Grow and Care for Peony Plants



Paeonia lactiflora



The herbaceous Peony has been cultivated in home gardens for over 600 years.

Considering the beauty of the flower and the longevity of the plants, it's no wonder why they have long been a perennial favorite.

Peony clumps may survive for up to as long as 50 years,

so it is advisable to prepare the growing site very thoroughly before planting.

*Once established in the garden, Peony plants are reasonably free from maintenance and **problem***

Growing Requirements for Peony Plants

Peonies grow best in cool climates, because they will *only bloom well* if they experience period of winter chilling.

Peonies grow and flower best in full sun, but will tolerate some light afternoon shade. Peony plants are not overly fussy as to the soil, but they will definitely benefit from the **organic material and compost** into the planting hole when they are set into the garden. Other than that, they need good drainage and a **soil pH that is close to neutral** (pH 7.0) only slightly acidic.

Peonies should be planted away from large trees or shrubs because they will have comp and nutrients, resulting in the size and the quantity of the flowers being reduced.

Planting Peonies

Peony plants do not respond well to transplanting, so **choose your planting location carefully**. The best time to plant peonies is in early fall. (*early September until mid October* are ideal) they have time to become established in the soil before winter.

Mature plants will reach a diameter of three feet or more and so it is important to give them room to grow and develop.



The **planting hole** should be at least 18 inches deep and about 18 inches in diameter.

At the bottom of the hole, add a 4 inch layer of organic matter such as compost, pine bark, or *well-aged* manure. A food (*10-6-4*), bone meal or superphosphate should be mixed into this layer.

You should avoid adding fertilizer to the soil that will be in direct contact with the roots.

Fill the hole half way with a mix of garden soil and compost, and then set the root division in place with the eyes facing outward and evenly.

Water thoroughly.

Make certain that the eyes will be no deeper than two inches when the planting is completed, or your Peony. If potted peonies are being planted, plant them at same level as they are growing in the pot.

After the division or plant is in place, work the soil in around the roots, finish filling the hole, and then water again. *If root divisions are planted in the spring, they may not bloom for up to two years. However, Peonies which are planted growing may bloom for you the first year when planted early enough in the spring.*

Feeding and Watering Your Peony Plants

Peonies should be fed in early spring and again halfway through the growing season. Cultivate a half cup of **low nit** into the soil when new growth about 2 or 3 inches high.

Use care not to damage the roots, and try to keep the fertilizer from direct contact with them.

Over-fertilizing, especially with a high nitrogen plant food, results in weak stems and reduced flowering.

Peonies are particularly partial to potash, and will benefit from the incorporation of a couple cups of fireplace ash in spring.

During the dry summer months, Peonies require regular, deep watering. A spring application of 2-4 inches of leafy mulch to conserve the soil moisture and at the same time keep the soil cool and control weeds. This mulch must be removed in winter and a new, fresh winter mulch of loose straw or evergreen boughs added, to help control disease.

Larger Peony flowers will be produced if the *side* buds on each stem are removed as soon as they are visible. The top tip is left intact.

To prevent the flowers from breaking or bending over during a strong wind or rain, provide a sturdy plant stake and support with garden twine or strips of cloth.

Remove the flowers as soon as they fade to prevent seed development, which will use up needed food reserves, and in the fall, after the foliage dies back, cut the stems back to three inches, remove and destroy them.

Dividing Peony Clumps

Peonies should only be transplanted or divided when it becomes absolutely necessary. An established and productive plant may not need **dividing** for ten to fifteen years or longer.

Carefully dig around and under the plant to avoid cutting off roots and remove the clump from the hole.

Remove all of the old foliage, and hose the dirt from the root cluster.

Carefully cut or pull apart the roots into sections, making sure there are at least 3 or 4 growth eyes in each new section.

Trim away any soft or damaged spots with a sharp, clean knife. Dust the cut surfaces with a fungicide to discourage disease infection and rot.

Replant into a newly prepared area of the garden.

It is *not* a good idea to plant them in the same place where they were previously growing.

Simple Trick To
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Peonies
Paeonia lactiflora

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