Peonies
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Photo courtesy Frost Hill Farm, Belmont VT

Some peony facts
- Known in China 1000BCE
- First used Far East for medicines 2000 years ago; medieval times in Europe
- One of main motifs early Chinese art, later (8thC) in Japan, in Europe 18thC
- 1789 first tree peony to Europe
- Grown in U.S. pioneer gardens
- Species native through No. hemisphere (tree species to China), 30-50 species
- Est. 3000 cultivars

Tao Rong, 1872-1927

Peony (Paeonia) types
- Herbaceous
- Tree
- Itoh
- Flower types
- Culture
- Pests and Problems

Henri Fantin-Latour, 1881

Types of Peonies-- Herbaceous
- lactiflora or hybrids of species
- herbaceous—die back to ground
- many flower types, usually pinks, reds, white
- USDA zones 3-8

Photo courtesy Wikipedia.uk

Types of Peonies– Tree (Moutan)
- woody stems loose leaves in fall, stems remain; to 4ft tall
- fewer flower types, many colors
- very long lived
- national flower of China
- usually hybrids of species

Photo courtesy Photobucket

Some popular Tree peonies
- Black Dragon– dark pink
- Coral Terrace– coral pink
- Luoyang Red– magenta red
- Blue Sapphire– light/dark purple
- Phoenix White (Feng Dan Bai)– white, gold to reddish fall leaves

Generally USDA zones (4) 5-9
(all above listed hardy to USDA zone 4)
Japanese Tree Peonies

- Tree peonies from China to Japan 8th C
- Simpler flowers (often semidouble), usually larger
- Seldom fragrant
- Bloom later than Chinese
- More uniform habit

Photo courtesy treepeonygarden.com

Types of Peonies – Itoh (Intersectional)

- Crosses of herbaceous and tree, after Itoh breeder
- Leaves of tree, flowers like tree, die to ground in winter as herbaceous, habit like herbaceous, pricey

Garden Treasure

Photo courtesy Photobucket

Some popular Intersectionals (Itoh)

- Bartzella – yellow with red, lemony, mid
- Cora Louise – white/lavender, semi-double
- Garden Treasure – yellow, semi-double, mid-late, lemon scent, sturdy, hardy
- Hillary – light red, semi-double, mid, fragrant, long bloom
- Kopper Kettle – copper orange, semi-double
- Morning Lilac – lilac, early, fragrant

Types of Peonies – Other

- fernleaf
- species
  – Often rare, endangered in native habitats, confused nomenclature
  – Often hard to grow, hard to find, mainly for specialists/breeders

Types of Peony Flowers: Single

- 5 or more broad petals in one or two rows
- mass of central stamens (often gold)
Some popular Singles

- Blaze – red, early-mid, sturdy
- Claire de Lune – pale lemon yellow, very early, low, fragrant, sturdy, slow grower
- Early Scout – dark red, ferny foliage
- Krinkled White – light pink opening white, late, light fragrance, sturdy
- Scarlett O’Hara – red/gold center, early-mid, light fragrance, tall
- Sea Shell – pink, mid, fragrant, sturdy

Types of Peony Flowers: Semi-double

- fertile center
- several layers of petals often mixed with stamens

Some popular Semi-doubles

- Buckeye Belle – dark red, early, sturdy, dark red fall leaves
- Coral Charm – coral, early-mid, tall
- Miss America – light pink buds open white, early-mid, fragrant
- Paula Fay – bright (watermelon) pink, gold centers, early, sturdy
- Pink Hawaiian Coral – coral pink, early-mid, fragrant, sturdy

Types of Peony Flowers: Double

- usually sterile
- central flower parts all “petaloid” (stamens resemble petals)
- Most popular and as cuts

Some popular Doubles

- Alexander Fleming – pink, mid, very fragrant
- Bowl of Cream – white, mid, light fragrance, large flowers
- Duchesse de Nemours – white, mid, very fragrant, heirloom (1856)
- Edulis Superba – pink, early, lower, very fragrant (roses), needs staking
- Elsa Sass – white, late, lower, light fragrance, sturdy

Some more popular Doubles

- Festiva Maxima – white, early, very fragrant, stake, heirloom (1851)
- Gardenia – blush/white, early-mid, light fragrance, sturdy
- Kansas – red, mid, fragrant
- Karl Rosenfield – red, late, fragrant, large flowers, stake
- La France – pink, late, fragrant, sturdy
- Le Cygne – white, early-mid, fragrant
Yet more popular Doubles

- Nick Shaylor—blush/white, large flowers, mid-late, fragrant, stake
- Paul M. Wild—red, mid, fragrant, stake
- Raspberry Sundae—pink, mid, fragrant
- Sarah Bernhardt—pink, late, fragrant, stake, heirloom (1906)
- Walter Faxon—pink, mid, light fragrance, heirloom (1904)

Types of Peony Flowers: Japanese

- Like single only larger stamens = “staminoid”, non-fertile
- 5 or more petals
- Not from Japan, just admired there

Some popular Japanese

- Bowl of Beauty—light pink, pale yellow staminoides, large flowers, sturdy
- Bride’s Dream—white, late, fragrant, sturdy
- Do Tell—pink/rose red center, mid, light fragrance, long bloom, sturdy
- Gay Paree—pink/white center, mid, fragrant, sturdy

Some more popular Japanese

- Kay Tischler—pink/yellow center, long bloom, late
- Mikado—red, late, tall, sturdy
- Nippon Beauty—dark red, gold petaloid center, late, light fragrance
- Sword Dance—red/gold center, late, sturdy

Types of Peony Flowers: “Bomb” or Anemone

- between Japanese and double
- Several rows of petals, broad central ones—petaloid

Some popular “Bomb” or Anemone

- Big Ben—red, early-mid, fragrant
- Fairy’s Petticoat—pink, early, large flowers, fragrant
- Felix Crousse—raspberry red, mid-late, light fragrance, stake, heirloom (1881)
- Monsieur (Mons.) Jules Elie—pink, early-mid, fragrant, stake, heirloom (1888)
- Raspberry Sundae—white/pink, late, fragrant, stake
- Red Charm—red, early, light fragrance
Peony types

Culture

Pests and Problems

Henri Fantin-Latour, 1881

Peony culture
(herbaceous and tree)

- Avoid planting where peonies prior
  - Diseases, lacking micronutrients
- Soil—well-drained essential
- Fertility—tolerate low, avoid high nitrogen, compost may be all that is needed (or 5-3-4 organic, spring)
- “deadhead” after bloom
- Transplant in fall, if needed

Cultural differences—herbaceous/tree
(treat Itoh as herbaceous)

- Sun
  - Herbaceous—full
  - Tree—part, especially warm climates, not full shade
- Planting depth
  - 2 in. max. herbaceous, 6 in. Tree (root along stem underground)

More Cultural differences—herbaceous/tree

- Staking
  - Herbaceous—especially older cultivars, less often newer hybrids
  - Tree—usually not need
- Dividing
  - Herbaceous—if needed eg. space, promote vigor/flowering
  - Tree—not, generally from main trunk, usually grafted

Peony staking

- cages
  - May need extra support
- stakes
- early in season
- mainly herbaceous

Diag. courtesy ISU Extension publ 1313

More Cultural differences—herbaceous/tree

- Cutting back
  - Herbaceous—late fall, to near ground
  - Tree—not (next year blooms in stems)
- Winter
  - Herbaceous—need freezing
  - Tree—don’t need freezing, do need dormancy
**Tree Peony culture**
- Prefer about neutral soil (6.5 – 7.5)
- Place well– don’t like moving
- Watch for basal shoots resembling herbaceous, remove if so
  - Often grafted onto herbaceous
  - Area below swollen bulge=graft union

**Peony planting**
- Fall (Sep-Oct, even Nov)
- Proper depth
  - (2in. or less for herbaceous, 6in. tree)
- Mulch first winter
  - Helps avoid frost heaving
- Keep watered
  - Drought tolerant once established
- Keep weeded

**Herbaceous Peony planting**
- roots with 3-5 “eyes” (buds)
  - Larger may bloom sooner, but often then decline=less vigor

**Herbaceous Peony planting**
Diag. courtesy USDA Home and Garden bull. 126

**Peonies as cut flowers**
- Don’t remove flowers/leaves if 3yo or less, only 50% max. older plants
  - Need leaves to produce carbs
- Don’t remove over 1/3 plant leaves
- “marshmellow soft”, buds showing color
- Cut early a.m. or late p.m.

**Peonies as cut flowers**
- During growth, disbud?
  - Remove smaller side buds near main terminal bud
  - Larger main flower
  - Leave on=more smaller flowers
- water in vase, preservative, change every 3 days, no leaves in water
  - Warm water=faster opening
Peony types

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Henri Fantin-Latour, 1881

Peony problems—botrytis

- Black spots on leaves, stems, buds abort (bud blast)
  - Blast also from drought/frost early
- Wet weather, overhead watering
- Change culture, good air flow
- Fungicides after emergence to bloom, after bloom, follow labels
- Remove leaves/stems in fall

Other Peony Problems

- Wilt
  - Too wet soil, too dry (young plants)
- Notches in leaves= slugs
  - Coffee grounds, crushed shells, trapping, copper, remove mulch
- Ants— not a problem
  - Attracted to sweet sap
  - Cut flowers— rinse in cold water bath
  - Myth: ants open flower buds

Failure to flower

- Planted too deep (herbaceous)
- Too much shade
- Too much fertilizer (nitrogen)
- Overcrowded
- Immature plants, new transplants
- Drought early in bud stages
- Disease (botrytis)
- Late freeze/frosts

Hildene
Manchester, VT

Photo courtesy: Photobucket.com, PaulBach

King’s Garden
Fort Ticonderoga, NY
Perry’s Perennial Pages
(search on Google, or)
perrysperennials.info

Plants of the month
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