

Peonies

by Pat Stachon

Imagine a summer of peonies. Choose your varieties carefully and you will have a marvelous display for 6-8 weeks. The choice might be daunting so I've listed a few things to keep in mind so you can be rewarded with 7 weeks of beautiful blooms.

Reliable, dependable, showy, and generally disease free, peonies do so well in Eastern Ontario because they require the winter chills (we have that) to grow and flower well. They require full sun, do well in light shade, and well drained soil. Moist soil is wonderful but they can survive in droughty mid-summer periods.

Starting the middle of May, I have a fern leaf peony in bloom, a beautiful small plant 2-3 feet high, fern leaf like foliage which lasts until August, and dark red single petals with large yellow stamens. It doesn't flop in the rain and doesn't need staking. The blooms last 2 weeks in hot weather and longer in cool temperatures. At the end of May the tree peonies come into bloom. These are a little more persnickety to grow in our area so I shall deal only with the herbaceous varieties.

In the early part of June there are the very early singles, semi doubles and doubles, that require some staking. Mid June there are mid-season singles, semi doubles, and double flowering, all shades of pinks, reds, lavenders, and whites, with beautifully formed flowers. There are tall fluid peonies adding grace and movement at the back of a herbaceous border. There are peonies with side buds and some with or without fragrance. If you are a lover of foliage, peonies have a variety of leaves and colours providing contrast in the garden. In the fall remember to plant your bulbs near your peonies since in the spring, their great foliage hides the dying leaves of the tulips and daffodils which seem to take forever to disappear. There are late varieties of peonies as well which will take you into early July depending on the temperature.

To stake peonies, A peony ring is absolutely ideal, but 3-4 bamboo stakes and some twine put in place at the time of budding will keep

your plant tidy and in order during those windy and wet periods that we have in mid June. Peonies with double blooms and side buds and slim stems will require staking. Staking is not an exact science, but only you can determine the need.

Planting depth is critical. If planted too deep, they will not flower. The hard and fast rule is 1 1/2 -2 inches of earth over the topmost buds which are the little reddish nodules that are next years buds. Plant in the fall. and try to keep them in the same locale. They like the same spot and do not liked to be moved.

I have stated that there are 7 weeks of peonies. There are also 7 reasons to plant peonies and here they are: easy to grow, gorgeous flowers, low maintenance, drought tolerant, wonderful foliage, live forever, beautiful colours.

If you don't already have peonies in your garden, I hope I have convinced you to add some soon!

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United Counties Master Gardeners

If you have any gardening questions, please e-mail them to mg.questions@ripnet.com or telephone Wednesday afternoons Lindley 613-445-0754 or Pat 613-821-2201.