

Peonies, those wonderful perennials that make a statement in the garden, in bloom are making a fashion comeback in American gardens. The peony has a long, long history and includes several species, each separate in its own way. History tells us that the mother of Apollo originally introduced the peony.

- Herbaceous peonies are bushy plants that die down to the ground in the fall. Of these, the Peony officinalis consists of the red single or double peony and the white single and double varieties. This is considered the "granddaddy" of the genus. It is quite the old-fashioned one.
- The Peony albiflora, an improved type, has blooms of several colors single and double in form, many are fragrant. This is the principal type of peony grown today. Sometimes it is called *peony sinensis* or Chinese peony. Within this group of herbaceous peonies there is a narrow-leaved variety, a pale yellow one and another that is native to India.
- The second classification of this plant is the tree peony that has woody stems and doesn't die down in the fall. Two classes are Peony suffruticosa (woody) with large blooms sporting various colors, a native of western China, and Peony lucida (yellow), discovered in southern China in 1882.
- There are so many varieties of this flower on the market today, that if you are considering a purchase, it's wise to consult with a nurseryman about what is available and what is best for your growing conditions.
- There are eight types of herbaceous peonies:

**down to earth**  
**Marty Figley**

single, Japanese, anemone, semi-double, crown, bomb, semi-rose and rose.

There are many sizes of blooms and varieties for various blooming periods.

If you plan well, there can be peonies in bloom in your garden over long periods of time. Peonies can be used in many ways in the garden, from border plants to specimen. They combine well with iris, lilies, and lilies of the valley.

When selecting them for your garden, make sure the roots are in good condition and the grower has had some experience in this line. As with all gardening purchases, make sure that the grower is reliable.

Good drainage is very important, although peonies require plenty of moisture just before and during the blooming period. Don't plant them close to trees or building foundations where they have a lot of shade or must compete for nutrients. If planted under an overhang on the house, they may be deprived of needed moisture.

They like full sun, but can be shaded part of the day. Heavy loam soil is recommended and room for the plant to spread is beneficial.

The hole for peonies needs to be deep enough to accommodate the roots without crowding. At least 2 1/2 feet deep and 3 feet in diameter, filled with rich top soil and thoroughly mixed with good compost.

The uppermost eyes of the roots are usually placed 2-3 inches below the surface of the ground when leveled off. Tamp the soil around the plant gently with your hands and mark the location by drawing a circle around it.

Carefully position a stake between the roots to mark the location. Don't let the plants dry out. The tiny feeder rootlets must always be kept moist. A mulch of straw or leaves 3-4 inches deep should be applied the first winter after planting and removed during the first warm spring days.

The day to begin planting peonies is Sept. 15 and up to 5-6 weeks after. Planting before that date will impede the development of the unhardened root buds, which hold the leaves and flowers for the following year.

The information for this article was obtained from "The Peony" by A. Harding (#27 handover). First published in 1917 and again in 1985, the information is still applicable. You may order the book from Timber Press, 1-800-327-5660.

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In addition to the tour, a salad buffet lunch will be served at the Franklin Community Church from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. The lunch requires a separate \$5 ticket. This is a scholarship fund benefit.

## Showing dahlias

The Southeastern Michigan Dahlia Society's annual show will be from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 9, 10 at Winchester Mall, Avon and Rochester Roads, Rochester. No admission. There will be 800-1,000 blooms of all sizes and colors on display.

For information, call Henry Lenhoff, 557-4293.



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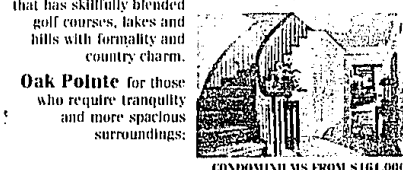
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