

Plant Peonies In September

By BETTY FRANKEL
Special Writer

Peonies are among the real glories of the garden in early June when their huge blossoms create a spectacular display. These beautiful, fragrant flowers are but a memory. However, now it is time to think about them again because September is the best time to plant peonies.

These plants can add great beauty to the garden. There are both herbaceous kinds that die to the ground every

winter and shrubby kinds that are known as tree peonies.

The herbaceous peonies are the kind most frequently grown. Their ancestors came from Europe and Asia Minor and they have been grown for centuries. They were planted in gardens in ancient Greece and Rome.

The most common wild type of peony has deep crimson flowers about five inches in diameter, with a single row of petals. Breeding and crossing has resulted in the

huge double blooms that grace modern gardens.

There are also large blooms with a single row of petals surrounding a central mass of fluffy golden stamens and kinds with a double row of petals and feathery centers. Colors include white, pale yellow, and many shades of pink and red.

The leaves are rich dark green, and the rounded mound of foliage makes a handsome addition to the garden even when the plants are no longer in bloom. Of even older lineage are

the tree peonies, which are natives of the Orient. These are leafy-losing woody shrubs which grow three to five feet in height. The leaves are similar to those of the herbaceous peonies, but are thinner and less leathery and are more deeply cut.

The tree peonies come into bloom a few weeks earlier than the herbaceous peonies, and bear many immense single or double flowers of an exquisite beauty. Colors include many shades of yellow as well as lavender, pinks, reds and white.

The tree peonies thrive in ordinary loamy garden soil, but good drainage is essential. Light sandy soil or heavy clay soil should have compost, humus, or even old turf mixed with it to make it suitable. Do not use peat moss or manure.

The herbaceous peonies need a deep rich soil that doesn't get too dry in summer. To prepare the soil it should be dug deeply to a depth of 12 to 20 inches and a generous amount of compost or well-rotted manure should be worked into the lower depths of the bed.

Both the tree peonies and the herbaceous peonies will grow well in full sun or in light shade as long as there is no competition from tree roots.

It is a mistake, though, to plant them with an eastern exposure. Sun shining on the buds on a frosty morning will damage them and spoil the blooms. With a south, west, or southwest exposure there is no danger.

When planting herbaceous peonies make the planting hole about two feet across and 1 1/2 feet deep. Set the plant so the tops of the buds or crown will be no more than two inches below the surface of the soil when the hole is filled.

If the soil tends to be heavy set them only an inch below the surface. Shallow planting will not hurt the plants, but if the buds are too deep the plants will not bloom. Fill the hole with soil mixed with a generous amount of peat moss or humus and with a big handful of bone meal.

If there are any stems left on the plant, cut them off close to the ground. The first winter after they are planted, put a mulch of straw, hay or evergreens over the plants after the ground is frozen. This will not be needed in subsequent winters.

If you have established peonies that are blooming well, it is better not to transplant them unless it is absolutely essential. They resent being moved. However, with care they can be dug and divided to increase your supply of plants. Each division should have three to five eyes.

Tree peonies need deep planting because the woody

tips have been grafted onto a herbaceous rootstock. To plant tree peonies make the hole three feet in diameter and two feet deep. Dispose of any subsoil, replacing it with compost or humus. Mix in a pound of bone meal to enrich the soil and help make it neutral or slightly alkaline. Don't use peat moss or manure.

Place the plant so the graft is six or seven inches below the surface of the soil. Spread the roots slightly but use care since they are brittle and could snap off. Fill in the hole with the enriched soil and water thoroughly. Keep it well watered until cold weather.

It is a good idea to cover the tree peony shrub with an inverted basket the first winter. Weigh the basket down with a rock or brick.

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