



# J&L Garden Center

The All Season Gift and Garden Center

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## Peony Care



*Itoh Peony*

Peonies are rated among the most beautiful of all plants, both in plant and flower. They are easy to grow and can be used in large plantings or as a single specimen plant. Peonies will produce magnificent flowers for many years with very little care. The blossoms are large, showy, have many different forms, and are available in several different colors. If you choose early, mid-season, and late blooming varieties,



you may have blossoms for 6 to 8 weeks. Peony plants are hardy. They will grow in almost any climate and in almost any soil. Peonies are deer and squirrel resistant, so they are perfect for any yards and gardens. Follow these easy guidelines and your peonies will grow and bloom beautifully for many years to come.

### Location

Peonies like full sun but they will tolerate a small amount of shade during the day. Peonies planted in too much shade (more than three to five hours a day) will grow, but they may not bloom well.



Peonies are very drought tolerant. Peonies will not tolerate "wet feet", **they must always have good drainage.** Peonies would rather be kept a little too dry than a little too wet. Water should never stand around them.

Give peonies plenty of room to grow; at least three feet. **Do not crowd peonies** with other shrubs or trees that will rob moisture and nutrients from their roots. Do not plant a new peony plant where a peony plant was just removed if the previous plant did not grow and bloom well. Peonies are susceptible to soil diseases that have no chemical controls. The only solution is to plant a brand new plant in a brand new location.

Peony plants do not respond well to transplanting, so choose your planting location carefully. Do not move or divide peonies very often. Peonies usually do not need to be divided until they are at least ten to fifteen years old.

Peonies attract butterflies and are great cut flowers. They are also deer, rabbit, and squirrel resistant.

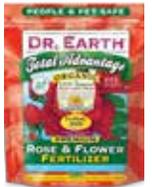
### Soil and Fertilizer

Peonies will grow in almost any type of good garden soil, provided they are not kept too wet in the winter. They bloom best in heavy (clay) soils. Peonies planted in heavy soils may grow slow, but they produce an abundance of blossoms. Peonies grown in light (sandy) soils produce an abundance of leaves, but they may not produce as many blossoms.



All peonies benefit from Bumper Crop, well-rotted compost, or manure mixed in the soil at planting time, and adding it every year as a top dressing. Good compost adds micro-organisms and micro-nutrients that help promote healthy root growth.

Fertilize peonies every spring and fall with a balanced flower fertilizer such as **Dr. Earth Rose and Flower Food** or **6-10-4 Vegetable and Flower Food. Bone Meal** is a good fertilizer to use when first planting a peony, but it is usually too slow acting to use during the year.



Peonies may take one to three years to start blooming after planting, depending on soil fertility and other growing conditions.

### Planting Time

The best time to divide, transplant or plant new peony roots is in the fall; **mid-September through October.** If absolutely necessary (and only if you are very careful) peonies may be moved any time of the year, even when they are in full leaf or blooming.



When dividing, always inspect peony roots before planting. Check for any diseased areas, dry areas, or areas damaged by insects. Dust your peony roots with **Bonide Garden Dust** before planting them. Bulb dust helps to prevent many insect and disease problems.

Pot-grown peonies may be planted any time of the year without any problems. Most gardeners still plant peonies in the spring or summer because that is when they see them growing so beautifully in their neighbor's yards.



### Planting Depth

Perhaps the most common mistake made when planting peonies is '**planting them too deep**'. Peonies that are planted too deep will not bloom, or the few blossoms they do produce will be underdeveloped. Plant peony roots with the "eye" an half-inch below ground level; pointed up. Do not plant peony roots upside down (you would be surprised how often this occurs).



Dig a hole large enough that the roots will not be crowded. Mix 1/3 **Bumper crop** and 2/3 garden soil to put back in the

hole. Apply 4 to 5 tablespoons of either **Dr. Earth Starter Fertilizer** or **Blood and Bone meal** three to four inches below the peony root.

In the fall, after frost, mound soil over the peony for extra protection. Level the soil the following spring; so the peony won't be too deep. This is only necessary the first winter.

## Staking or Caging

Taller peony varieties, and those with double flowers, always need staking. Peony blossoms often drag the stems down, especially after rain or sprinkler watering.

The best prevention is to install a peony cage, a central stake, or a grid on stilts, over the shoots early in the spring. The stems will grow up through the spaces of the grid so it supports the plant when the blooms get heavy.

If using a stake, be sure to tie the stems loosely to it with garden twine or stretchable plastic tie.

Remove the flowers as soon as they fade to prevent seed development, which uses the needed food reserves, and may effect next year's bloom.



## Insect and Disease Problems

Peonies are fairly insect and disease free, more so than many other flowers in the garden. If the plant does have problems, it is typically caused by diseases or insects. Many problems can be minimized just by sanitation practices. Always cut back and dispose of any damaged tissue during the growing season. In fall, as soon as the plant begins to fade, cut it back to the ground and dispose of the foliage. If the stems or leaves are blighted, do not add them to your compost.

You may need to spray the plant several times in spring or summer with either a fungicide or insecticide to prevent certain problems. Always apply the pesticides according to label directions. *Please read our pesticide safety handout for more information.*

**Powdery Mildew** is a leaf disease that may be a problem. Prevent powdery mildew by irrigating your plants rather than sprinkling them. **Infuse Fungicide** is a good fungicide to control mildew if your plants become infected.

**Botrytis:** This is a fungal disease that can ruin a bud as it develops. Botrytis causes a fuzzy gray coating on the flowers and often kills the buds. (Botrytis can also affect the rest of the plant.) Botrytis thrives in humid conditions and can be avoided or minimized by making sure the peony is planted where it receives lots of sun and has good air circulation. Once the disease is noticed, it is too late to save the buds for that season. Diseased areas should be removed. The whole plant can be treated later in the season with a fungicide.

**Root rot** is a soil disease that will infect peonies. Root rot is usually caused by keeping your plants too wet. Root rot will prevent your peony plants from blooming. If your plants have root rot, you must discard the infected plants and plant new peony roots in a new area. There is **no chemical control for root rot**. Don't ever plant new peony roots where a peony was infected unless you remove a three foot ball of soil and replace the old soil with fresh soil.

**Thrips:** When the flower opens and there are streaks or brown areas within its petals, this is probably due to thrips. To

check for thrips, crumble the damaged flower onto a piece of clean white paper. Then gently tip the paper to remove all the petals and loose debris. Look closely at the paper. Thrips are tiny and are usually yellow. They will look like very thin dash marks. Thrips cannot be effectively treated once they are found but they can be minimized by using a systemic insecticide.

**Root maggots and root weevil** are two common insects that infest peonies. These two insects will prevent peonies from blooming by eating at the roots.

Drench your plants regularly with **Bonide Annual Tree and Shrub Insecticide** if you suspect root maggots.

**Root weevil** are a little harder to control than root maggots. Root weevil live in the soil during the day, eating the roots, and then crawl out on the leaves after dark to eat the edges of the leaves. Leaf damage does not hurt the plant other than making it unsightly.

If your plants have root weevil, spray them, just before dark, with a systemic insecticide, such as **Orthene or Merit**. Spray peonies every 10 to 14 days from late-May through early-August to control root weevil. You can sometimes prevent Root Weevil by drenching your plants with **Bonide Annual Tree and Shrub Insecticide** in the spring. *Please read our Root Weevil handout for more information.*



**Ants:** Ants on peony buds are common and totally harmless. They are not needed to "open" flower buds as some people maintain. They are attracted to the sugary droplets on the outside of flower buds or to the honeydew produced by aphids or scale insects.

Do not try to get rid of the ants on your peonies. This is just a natural and a temporary activity. The ants may be found covering certain varieties and avoiding others, this is totally normal. Once the buds have opened the ants will disappear.

## Winter Care

In the fall, when peony leaves turn brown, cut off the leaves and remove them. Either put the dead leaves in a compost pile or send them to the dump. **Do not let the leaves remain, or rototill the dead leaves into your flower gardens;** without composting them first. Many insects and diseases live on these dead leaves during the winter.

Cover newly planted roots with six inches of soil the first winter to protect them from frost. Be sure to remove this soil early the following spring. Most older plants do not need this extra protection.

## Why Peonies Fail to Bloom

**Planting too deeply.** Peonies are fussy about planting depth. The eye of the peony should be 1.5 inches below the surface of the soil. If they are too deep, flower buds may not form. If they are too shallow, flower buds may be killed by cold. Sometimes plants that started out at the right depth settle, or the soil level is raised over time by layers of mulch, and the eyes end up too deep.

**Plants are too small.** Peony roots should have at least 3 to 5 eyes before they are big enough to bloom.

**Plants are too young.** Generally, peonies bloom very little the first year or two after they are planted or moved. They bloom best when they haven't been moved or divided.



**A Late Freeze.** Once the peony starts out of its dormancy in spring, a late freeze can kill developing flower buds, even if they are still under the surface of the soil.

**Excess nitrogen.** Peonies should be fertilized with low-nitrogen formulas. When they are over-fertilized or they are planted close to a lawn that gets a high nitrogen fertilizer, they develop lots of foliage with very few flowers

**Inadequate sunlight.** Peonies require full sun to bloom. Sometimes a peony will be planted in full sun, and a few years later surrounding plants have grown and made too much shade.

**Overcrowding.** Peonies like elbow room. Leave at least a foot all the way around each planted peony. When they are crowded, or have to compete for room, they may not bloom well.

**Insect or disease problems.** When a peony actually starts to form buds that don't fully develop or open, it is usually due to an insect or disease problem.

## Varieties

Peonies are available in more than 800 different varieties. Some varieties have a single row of petals, such as Japanese peonies. Other varieties have two or three rows of petals, while others are fully ruffled.

Some peony varieties bloom early, while others bloom mid-season or late. Some varieties may cost \$10 to \$20, while other varieties may cost up to \$100 to \$150. Listed below are some of the more common varieties of peonies:



## Red

**Adolphe Rousseau:** Double red. Early to mid-season. Grows tall. Has dark foliage.

**Felix Crousse:** Double red. Late - Mid-season. Grows medium height and has large crimson flowers.

**Kansas:** Mid to late season. Vivid crimson flowers are borne on exceptionally strong stems. It's still widely considered the very best double red Peony.

**Karl Rosenfield:** Mid-season. Magnificent, deep-red, double flowers that are stunning in the garden.

**Officinalis rubra:** Double red. Very early blooming peony, usually two weeks before other varieties. Roots are tubers, similar to dahlia roots.

**Okinawa:** Mid-season Japanese peony. Single Red flowers.

**Prince of Darkness:** Early blooming. Medium Height. Dark maroon red.



## Pink

**Officinalis rosea:** Double pink. Very early blooming peony, usually two weeks before other varieties.

**Dr. Alexander Flemming:** Fully double flowers are loaded with cleanly colored, deep pink petals. Very fragrant and a favorite for flower bouquets.

**Edulis superba:** Double pink. Early to mid-season variety. Medium size flowers, very fragrant.

**Gay Paree:** Mid-season, Single Petal, Japanese Type. Bold lightly-scented pink flowers with creamy white centers

**Paula Fay:** Semi-double, lightly-scented pink flowers with yellow centers.

**Sarah Bernhardt:** Large, double pink, mildly fragrant flowers. Dark center with light pink or white edges. Blooms late.



**James Mann:** Mid-season. Large dark pink, streaked with crimson flowers. Loose & fluffy flowers.

**Constance:** Large, mid-season, Japanese Peony. Single pink flowers.

## White

**Solange:** Double white. Blooms late. Some salmon-pink tinge. Medium height.

**Duchesse de Nemours:** large white flowers that are splotted with a touch of red

**Festiva Maxima:** Early, double white. Large flowers with pink blush and red specks, very fragrant.

**Mme de Vernville:** Double white. Early flowers. Crimson tips on some petals. Medium fragrance.

**Raspberry Sundae:** Double, raspberry and cream flowers. Wonderful, sweet fragrance.

**Albiflora:** Early Japanese Peony. Large, single white petals.



## Tree Peonies

Although tree peonies are not as common as garden peonies they are still a beautiful accent plant for your garden. Tree peonies are actually a woody shrub, and may grow 3-5 feet in height. They may take 2-3 years to become established and begin blooming heavily, but the wait is worth it.



Tree peonies should be planted in full sun or part sun. They require at least 4 to 5 hours of sunlight daily.

Tree peony roots can grow 3 to 4 feet into the ground, so plan accordingly. When planting, the hole should be large and deep with ample room to accommodate all the roots. In general, the depth of the hole should be at least 18 inches wide and deep; larger if planting containerized peonies. Fertilize tree peonies regularly; but not too heavily.

**1st Application:** Fertilize in the early spring. At this time, the leaf may not be fully developed and spread, but the roots are actively growing.

**2nd Application:** Apply soon after blooming. This will help the plant recover and will provide the necessary nutrients for new growth.

**3rd Application:** The final fertilization stage should take place between late fall and early winter. Use half as much fertilizer as required in the previous two stages. Over-fertilization during any time of the year, especially with nitrogen, usually results in weak stems and reduced flowering.

Once established, tree peonies are drought tolerant plants. Excess water will suffocate the roots and is the leading cause of plant failure. Do not keep the soil continuously moist. Do not water until soil is dry below the surface, and try not to sprinkle the leaves when watering; to prevent fungus.

Be observant; soil can dry out on top and still be moist 6-12" below the surface. When you feel the soil is dry below the first 4-6" and leaves may droop slightly, water the roots deeply.

Tree peonies need a little more winter protection than common peonies. Mulch them well just after the ground freezes; cover them four to six inches deep with straw, leaves, or mulch. Let the ground freeze before mulching so the tree peonies will be dormant and then cover them with the mulch. A tomato cage covered with a burlap sleeve will aid in your over-wintering success, especially during harsh winters.



Tree peonies may take three to four years to start blooming after they are planted. Do not transplant tree peonies or they may take even longer to start blooming. Flowers can be up to twelve inches in diameter and can vary in form from single to fully double. Tree peonies are available in Yellow, Green, Pink, Blue, Red, Purple, Black and Multi-color. A mature plant can have in excess of a hundred flowers and the blossoms can be 10" or more across.



## Itoh Peonies

Those who admire the colorful and exotic flowers of tree peonies, but prefer the perennial growing cycle of herbaceous peonies, will love the Itoh Peonies, also known as *intersectional hybrids*.



Itoh peonies are hybrids between Tree Peonies and Herbaceous Peonies. Their blooms are large, just like the tree peonies, and the foliage is like that of the tree peony as well. Their stems die back in the fall and must be cut back just like the herbaceous peonies. They are long lived and do not like to be divided, just like the common garden peonies.

They tend to resemble tree peonies with a vigorous growth habit and large double flowers. They have disease-resistant, lacy, dark-green foliage. After their flowering cycle, you will enjoy this handsome bush for the remainder of the season.

Once established, Itoh Peonies have an extended blooming period, with as many as 50 blooms in a single season due to their ability to produce primary and secondary buds. The flowers are excellent to use in cut flower arrangements. The plants will grow up to three feet tall and wide, and will continue to improve with age.

## Planting and Maintenance

Plant in full sun and in rich, well drained soil. Dig a hole 18-24 inches deep and 18-24 inches wide.

They benefit from soil mixture of 2 parts top soil, 2 parts **Bumper Crop** compost and 1 part **Peat Moss**. If you have poor drainage, add sand and perlite instead of the peat moss.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

A slow release, high phosphate fertilizer added right at planting time ensures rapid root growth and development. **Dr. Earth Starter Fertilizer** is one of the best you can use.

Don't plant too deeply. The top of the root ball should be level with the soil and firmly settled in.

Avoid high nitrogen fertilizers at all times. Don't fertilize in the late-fall.

Water immediately after planting. Keep plants moist, but do not keep them constantly wet. During the winter season add mulch to prevent thawing and re-freezing.

Take care of your Itoh Peonies just as you would any herbaceous peony.

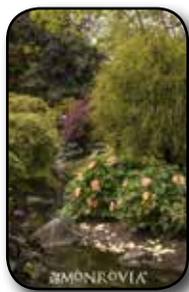


Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

## Varieties Photo Credit for all Itoh Peonies Monrovia Nursery

**Itoh Bartzella Peony** - Vigorous plant with stunning brilliant yellow blossoms up to 6". Semi-double to double, 36" high and wide. Mid to late bloomer. Has a pleasant, lemony fragrance and very vigorous growth.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

**Itoh Cora Louise Peony** - Large, semi-double blossoms, white with striking dark lavender central flares, stand above lush, toothed foliage. Flowers have a soft, pleasing scent and are a wonderful addition to any spring bouquet.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

**Itoh Joanna Marlene'** - MidSeason, 4"-6" semi-double, yellow blossom, with a delightful flower. Changes color as it matures, it changes from peach/salmon to yellow tones on the same petal. Good long stems, excellent for cutting.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

**Itoh Julia Rose Peony** - Large, double blossoms, soft apricot, blending to reddish-purple at the tips, stand above lush, toothed foliage. Flowers have a pleasant, slightly spicy scent.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

**Itoh Keiko Peony** - Large, semi-double to double flowers held on strong stems above a compact mound of dark green foliage. As the flower matures, the dark lavender pink petals slowly fade to a soft pink, revealing a cluster of yellow stamens in its center.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

The flower is lightly fragrant. Prefers full sun to dappled shade.

**Itoh Kopper Kettle Peony** - Large, semi-double blossoms, copper-orange with a darker center and occasional yellow streaks, stand above lush, toothed foliage.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

**Itoh Misaka Peony** - flowers appear orange when they first open, fading to a beautiful peachy yellow. Fully opened flowers can reach up to eight inches across, and have a wonderful mild fragrance. Large contrasting dark-red central flares are extremely prominent. Prolific flowering habit is due to its higher than average number of secondary buds.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

**Itoh Morning Lilac Peony** - Large, single to semi-double fuchsia-pink blooms with gold stamens are held on strong stems just above sturdy dark green foliage. Ideal for cut flower arrangements.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

**Itoh Sequestered Sunshine** - Large, bright canary-yellow blossoms with showy stamens stand above the lush, dark green, deeply dissected foliage. An especially vigorous plant, the sturdy flower stems require no staking and make good cut flowers.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

**Itoh Takara Peony** - Large flowers up to six inches across. When opening, blooms appear mostly pink, but are actually light yellow heavily flushed with deep lavender pink. As flowers mature, the pink and yellow fades to pale white, with a large dark burgundy flare in the center. Blooms appear early May through end of June.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

**Itoh Yumi Peony** - The large, double flower, measuring seven to eight inches, is spectacular: masses of clear yellow petals form a perfect flower with a light and very pleasant fragrance. Blooms are held on strong stems just above a compact mound of dark green, trouble-free foliage that lasts well into autumn. Ideal for cut flowers.



Photo Credit: Monrovia Nursery

## More Resources:

<http://www.americanpeonysociety.org/>

<http://www.theplantexpert.com/peonies/PeonyList.html>

<http://peonysenvy.com/peonycare.html>

<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/gardens-gardening/your-garden/help-for-the-home-gardener/advice-tips-resources/visual-guides/peony-problems.aspx>

[http://www.peonies.org/flower\\_types.html](http://www.peonies.org/flower_types.html)