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Thursday, May 1, 2025



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How to Grow Peonies: The Complete Peony Flower Guide



Photo Credit: Pixabay

Botanical Name: *Paeonia* spp.

Plant Type: Flower

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Planting, Growing, and Caring for Peony Flowers

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Peonies are perennials that return yearly to take your breath away with the fattest, most scrumptious flowers and lush green foliage. Learn how to care for peonies, how to keep them blooming, and more tips about growing peonies.

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About Peonies

In the 1930s and 1940s, plant catalogs listed only three peony choices: white, crimson, and rose pink. Today, thousands of varieties are available.

Peonies are flowering perennials best

flowers and also bear lovely foliage that stays green.

They are cold hardy, so any place you need an overcoat makes them happiest—they require a cold period for bud formation—a frustration to some southern gardeners.

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Once settled in the garden, peony plants can be content for generations. Some have been known to thrive for a century!

When Is Peony Season? When Do Peonies Bloom?

Peonies bloom from late spring through early summer, depending on your location and the variety of peonies you're growing.

Many nurseries offer early, midseason, and late-blooming varieties, allowing you to extend the peony season over many weeks and enjoy those lovely blooms for as long as possible!

Peonies are hardy to Zone 3 and grow well as far south as Zones 7 and 8. In most of the U.S., the rules for success are simple: provide full sun and well-draining soil. Peonies even relish cold winters because they need chilling for bud formation.

Types of Peony Flowers

There are six peony flower types:

anemone, **single**, **Japanese**, **semidouble**, **double**, and **bomb**. Fragrances vary as well—some plants, such as 'Festiva Maxima' and 'Duchesse de Nemours', have intoxicating rose-like scents, while others are

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There are six different types of peony flowers.

Where to Plant Peonies

Peonies make fine sentinels lining walkways or a lovely low hedge. After its stunning bloom, the peony's bushy clump of handsome, glossy green leaves lasts all summer and then turns purplish-red or gold in the fall, as stately and dignified as any flowering shrub.

In mixed borders, peonies bloom with columbines, baptisias, and [veronicas](#) and combine well with [irises](#) and [roses](#). Plant white peonies with yellow irises and a froth of forget-me-nots; set off pink peonies with blue nepeta or violets.

Read Next

- [Caring for Peonies: 10 Tips and Tricks for Success!](#)
- [20 Easy-to-Grow Perennial Flowers for Beginners](#)
- [How to Grow Lilies: The Complete Lily Flower Guide](#)

PLANTING

Peonies are not too fussy, but choose your location wisely as they resent disturbance and do not transplant well.

Peonies like full sun, and though they can manage with half a day, they bloom best in a sunny spot that gets 6 to 8 hours of sunlight each day. In southern states, provide some shade.

heavy. (Use stakes to hold them up, if necessary.) Don't plant too close to trees or shrubs, as peonies don't like to compete for food, light, and moisture.

Grow peonies in deep, fertile, humus-rich, moist soil that drains well. [Soil pH](#) should be neutral.

When to Plant Peonies

Peony plants require little maintenance as long as they are planted properly and establish themselves. Note, however, that they do not respond well to transplanting, so you should plan your planting site accordingly.

- Plant peonies in the fall: in late September and October in most of the U.S., and even later in the fall in Zones 7 and 8 ([Find your planting zone here](#)).
- If you must move a mature plant, fall is the time to do it—specifically, when the plant has gone dormant.
- Peonies should be settled into place about six weeks before the ground freezes.
- Although it's certainly possible to plant peonies in the spring, spring-planted peonies don't do as well. Experts agree: they generally lag about a year behind those planted in the fall.

How to Plant Peonies

- Peonies are usually sold as bare-root tubers with 3 to 5 eyes (buds), divisions of a 3- or 4-year-old plant.
- Space peonies 3 to 4 feet apart to allow for good air circulation between the plants. Stagnant, humid air can be a recipe for disease to develop.
- Dig a generous-sized hole, about 2 feet deep and 2 feet across in well-draining

heavy or very sandy, enrich it with extra compost. Incorporate about one cup of bonemeal into the soil. Learn more about [soil amendments](#) and [preparing soil for planting](#).

- Set the root so the eyes face upward on top of a mound of soil in the hole, placing the roots just 2 inches below the soil surface. Don't plant too deep! (In southern states, choose early-blooming varieties, plant them about 1 inch deep, and provide some shade.)
- Then, backfill the hole, taking care that the soil doesn't settle, and bury the root deeper than 2 inches. Tamp the soil gently.
- When planting a container-grown peony, cover it no deeper than it grew in the pot.
- Water thoroughly at the time of planting.



GROWING

How to Care for Peonies

Like children, young peonies take time to develop. They usually need a few years to establish themselves, bloom, and grow. And soon enough, they venture out on their own, mature and well-adjusted... Wait, no, that's just children.

Peonies thrive on benign neglect. Unlike most perennials, they don't need to be dug and divided every few years.

- Spare the fertilizer. Work the soil well before you plant, mixing in compost and a little fertilizer, and that should

- If your soil is poor, apply fertilizer (bonemeal, compost, or well-rotted manure) in early summer after the peonies have bloomed and you have deadheaded the flowers. Don't fertilize more than every few years.
- Help the stems. If peonies have any structural weakness, it's their stems, which are sometimes not strong enough to support their gigantic blossoms. Consider three-legged metal peony rings or wire tomato cages that allow the plant to grow through the center of the support.
- Deadhead peony blossoms as soon as they begin to fade, cutting to a strong leaf so that the stem doesn't stick out of the foliage.

Fall Peony Care

- After peony leaves begin to fade, side-dress plants with a balanced, slow-release fertilizer; avoid fertilizing with high nitrogen.
- After frost, the foliage will die back completely. Cut the plant to the

- Don't smother peonies with mulch.
Where cold temperatures are severe, for the first winter after planting, mulch VERY loosely with pine needles or shredded bark. Remove mulch in the spring.
- While peonies do not need to be divided like other plants, fall is a good time to divide or transplant if your plants are too large. Remove the leaves, then dig around the plant's roots in a large circle, and lift. If dividing, ensure a new section has at least 3 to 5 eyes. Replant.

Types

Peonies bloom between late spring and early summer, but you can plan your garden for a successive display of flowers from mid-May to late June by planting various varieties. Here are some choices:

- **Anemone** (an advanced Japanese form)
—'Laura Dessert': cream/pale lemon to white; strong fragrance; early-season
- **Single** (one row of petals)—'Sparkling

ters; fragrant; midseason

- **Semidouble** (five or more guard petals and prominent centers)—‘Pink Hawaiian Coral’: pink to coral rose form; slight fragrance; early-season
- **Double** (large petals, needs support)—‘Candy Stripe’: white, with red streaks; slight fragrance; mid- to late-season
- **Bomb** (large, like a scoop of petals)—‘Angel Cheeks’: soft pink; slight fragrance; midseason
- Consider, too, the **Itoh peony**: Named after its developer, Japanese botanist Dr. Toichi Itoh (d. 1956), this flower is a cross between a herbaceous (bush) peony and a tree peony. Its large single, semidouble, and double blooms appear later in the season and last longer than traditional peonies.

HARVESTING

Keeping Peony Flowers in a Vase

results, cut long stems in the morning when the buds are still fairly tight.

You can wrap freshly cut peony stems in a damp paper towel and put them in a plastic bag in the refrigerator until you're ready to use them. When removing the peonies from the refrigerator, give the stems a fresh cut and place them in lukewarm water to wake them up.



Peony flowers are some of the most beautiful additions to your garden!

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PESTS/DISEASES

Peonies are generally very hardy. Plus, peonies are also one of many [deer-resistant plants](#) you can grow in your garden.

However, they are susceptible to:

- **Verticillium wilt**
- **Ringspot virus**
- **Tip blight**
- **Stem rot**
- [Botrytis blight](#)
- **Leaf blotch**
- [Japanese beetles](#)
- **Nematodes**
- **Aphids**

Why Are There Ants on My Peonies?

Many gardeners wonder why so many [ants crawl on the peony buds](#). Don't

droplets on the outside of flower buds or to the honeydew produced by scale insects and aphids. Never spray the ants; they're helping you by keeping your peonies safe!



Ants often crawl all over peony flowers—but they are actually helping to protect them!

WIT AND WISDOM

- After at least 2,000 years of cultivation and breeding in China, the ornamental peony was introduced to Europe and America in about 1800.
- Two peony species are native to North America. Brown's, aka western, peony ranges from California to Montana, and the California peony is found along the Pacific coast of that state.

- Peonies are said to symbolize a happy life and a happy marriage. [See more flower meanings here.](#)
- Marco Polo described peony blossoms as “roses as big as cabbages.”
- According to the ancient practice of [phenology](#), when peonies blossom, it is safe to plant heat-loving melons, such as [cantaloupe](#).
- Peony petals are edible. Add to summer salads or use as garnish for lemonade and iced tea. [Read more about edible flowers!](#)

Had I but four square feet of ground at my disposal, I would plant a peony in the corner and proceed to worship. –Alice Harding, The Book of the Peony

FLOWERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Boeckmann

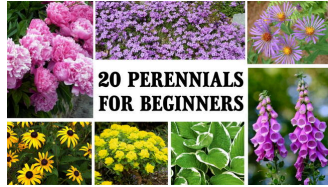
Catherine Boeckmann loves peonies.

each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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COMMENTS

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Marc kushner (not verified) 3 months 3 weeks ago

We have the peonies in a large flower pot for 5 years or more and have not had any flowers for 2 years can you give any advice on how to get

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REPLY**The Editors** 3 months 3 weeks ago

Hi Marc,

Sorry to hear about your peonies not blooming. There is a quick checklist of needs that peonies require that should be followed. Make sure it is getting the right amount of light—from 6 to 8 hours per day. Since container grown plants dry out quicker, be sure to water adequately, especially during hot spells. Follow the above Fall Care to ensure your plants get a jump start on the following growing season. And be sure to check for any signs of plants or diseases that can lead to blooming issues.

If you live in an area that receives freezing temperatures during winter or cold temperatures in early spring, take measures to protect your plants by moving to a location where the el-

While peonies do not like to be transplanted and don't need to be repotted often, it could also be an issue with the size of your container. Peony roots need ample room to grow and if your plants are too large and the roots are too large for the current container, it can lead to failure to bloom. Check the drainage holes to see if the roots are visible and if so, it might be time to transplant to a larger home. It could also be an issue that your potting mix is no longer providing what your plants need. If you have not amended your potting mix in some time, you could add some compost to provide a boost or transplant into new potting mix. The best time to transplant/divide is in early fall.

Hope this helps!

REPLY

peonies with their stunning, aromatic blooms,
had been a fave among florists and garden en-
thusiasts for loads of years.
thanks for sharing !

You may also like look on pink peonies in
[https://brightpulses.com/pink-peonies-a-
profit-and-expense-guide-for-farmers/](https://brightpulses.com/pink-peonies-a-profit-and-expense-guide-for-farmers/).

REPLY

Lisa Fisher (not verified) 8 months 3 weeks
ago

I so badly want to grow more prone plants, I
want to use the seed pods that are left after the
petals fall off. Are these the pods? If not, where
are they? How do I prepare them for fall plant-
ing? Can they be started indoors? Is there a
way to keep them through the winter for future
planting? I live in the Rocky Mountains of
Montana at 4800ft. Please and thank you, sin-
cerely appreciated!!

REPLY

Hi Lisa,

The pods that remain on your peonies will contain seeds. You can collect the seeds when the pods turn dark brown and slightly crack open. To make sure that you don't lose seeds to birds or weather, tie nylon or small mesh bags around maturing seed pods before they split open to catch any seeds that may fall. Ripe seeds can be planted immediately after collection. Peony seeds require a warm/cold cycle to produce their first true leaves in the spring. In nature, seeds are dispersed on warm late summer to autumn days and quickly germinate. By winter, they form small roots. They are then dormant during the winter before emerging in the spring.

Press peony seeds into the ground at no more than a 1/2 inch depth. Then cover with an inch of wood chips to provide protection.

longer to hydrate than fresh seed and dormancy is more difficult to break.

Hope this helps!

REPLY

Susan ann (not verified) 9 months ago

Two newly planted peonies have wilted and lost their leaves. My husband says they will come back in the spring. Will that?

REPLY

Faith Taggart (not verified) 8

months 4 weeks ago

Can you grow them in a large pot outdoors in the winter. I live in Fulton, MO.

REPLY

The Editors 9 months ago

country. Peonies bloom in the spring.

They are wilting due to the hot summer sun and the stress of planting, making this an unsuitable time for them.

If they establish, they bloom every spring. Please see our guide above for the best time to plant and other info.

REPLY

Jessica Hansen (not verified) 10 months ago

We are moving in a and I would like to take my peonies with me, what is the best way to go about potting the plant?

REPLY

The Editors 9 months 4 weeks ago

September is the best time to dig up peonies—after they stop growing and before they go dormant. Here is more info on transplanting a peony:

them stems down before you transfer to
the pot or a hole in the ground.

REPLY

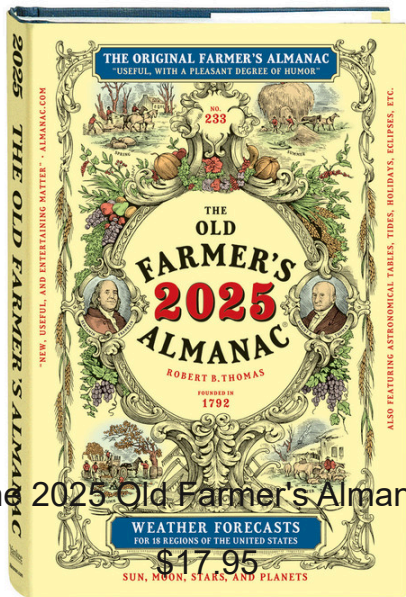
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