

# Peony Planting & Care Instructions

(From The Old Farmer's Almanac, Peonies by Allan Rogers and Bodacious Blooms)

As you plant your peony roots, remember that these are incredibly long lived plants, the better the start, the better they will do for you.

## PLANTING

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- Grow peonies in deep, fertile, humus-rich, moist soil that drains well. Soil pH should be neutral.
- Peonies are not fussy but choose your location wisely as they resent disturbance. Provide shelter from strong winds. Plant away from trees or shrubs as peonies don't like to compete for food and moisture. Space them three to four feet apart for good air circulation.
- Peonies like full sun, and though they can manage with half a day, they bloom best in a sunny spot.
- Plant peonies in the fall.
- Peonies should be settled into place before the first hard frost. Spring-planted peonies just don't do as well, experts agree; they generally lag about a year behind those planted in the fall.
- Dig a generous-sized hole, about two feet deep and two feet across in well-drained soil in a sunny spot. If the soil is heavy or very sandy, enrich it with compost. Incorporate about one cup of bonemeal into the soil. Tamp it firmly.
- Set the root so the eyes face upward on top of the firmed soil, placing the root at or just below the soil surface. Then backfill the hole, taking care that the soil doesn't settle.
- Water thoroughly.

**Tip:** Don't plant the eyes too deep or you won't see flowers!

## CARE

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Like children, young peonies take time to develop. They usually need a few years to establish themselves, bloom, and grow.

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

- After planting, no further nutrients need be added until the second fall. This application should be light. By the third year and thereafter, apply fertilizer twice per year in late fall or winter while the plants are dormant and again at flowering time.
- When fertilizing, check to make sure that next year's eyes are still close the surface.
- Help the stems. If peonies have any structural weakness, it is their stems, which are sometimes not strong enough to support their gigantic blossoms. Consider these options: (1) three-legged metal peony rings that allow the plant to grow through the center of the rings; (2) one pass of heavy duty garden twine around the plant about a foot from the top; or (3) two lines of heavy duty garden twine around the plant about 8

- to 12 inches from the top and another 12 inches below this. Even better support is provided if the twine is tied to a 2x2" stake that is securely anchored in the ground
- 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.
  - Cut the foliage to the ground in the fall to avoid any overwintering disease. Destroy leaves/branches away from peony plants.
  - Don't smother peonies with mulch or leaves. Remember, peony need winter chill.

## PESTS/DISEASES

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Peonies are generally very hardy. They are prone to Verticillium wilt, ringspot virus, tip blight, stem rot, Botrytis blight, leaf blotch, Japanese beetle, and nematodes.

Many gardeners wonder why so many ants crawl on the peony buds. They are eating nectar in exchange for attacking bud-eating pests. Never spray the ants; they're helping you nurture peonies to bloom.

Luckily, peonies are also gopher and deer-resistant plants.

In your first spring, you may or may not see flowers. Don't worry about this. In fact, if you get flowers, you should cut them off before they develop so that you are directing as much of the plant energy to the roots as possible. In the second year, you should also cut off the buds. You will be able to harvest about 50% of the flowers in year 3 and a greater number in year 4.

Recommended reading: Peonies by Allan Rogers