

Peonies are a beautiful and fragrant addition to the yard. They start blooming in late May and continue through June, especially if you collect a mixture of early, midseason, and late blooming varieties. Peonies are simple to grow and can be used as mass plantings, specimens, or hedges. They are delightful as cut flowers indoors and you can even decorate with the dried seed heads.

Peonies are very low maintenance: pick a permanent home for them (they don't appreciate being moved) in sun or part shade, protected from harsh winds (which can tear the blooms apart), with well-drained yet evenly moist (no bogs or deserts!), neutral pH, rich soil. Depth is extremely important when planting tubers (the thick, fleshy roots): too deep or too shallow and you get no flowers - even if you provide everything else they need perfectly! Around here in central New York State, the eyes (round growth points at the top of the tubers) should be planted between 1.5 and 2 inches deep. The only other maintenance peonies usually need is a top dressing of compost every fall.

These lovely plants can be very slow to establish themselves, but don't despair - they are worth the wait! Even when they don't appear to be growing much above ground, remember that their roots are expanding and growing. Take care of the roots and you'll have a spectacular flower display - for 50 years or more! That root system is why they are drought-tolerant once established, too.

Troubleshooting:

Ants: they love the nectar the flowers produce, but they don't actually cause any harm to the plant.

No Buds: 1) your peony is planted either too deep or too shallow

2) too much nitrogen (nitrogen = leaf growth)

Buds, But No Flowers: 1) late frosts are bud killers

2) disease turns buds black and then they drop off

3) thrips turn partially opened buds brown and then they drop off

4) excessive rain can waterlog buds and kill them

5) hungry plants don't have the energy to flower - feed them!

6) exposure to excessive heat aborts flowering (usually not a problem in NYS!)