

## SEASON'S OVERVIEW 2018

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*For images please visit the website.*



2018 shall be remembered as one of the shortest peony seasons ever (hopefully), it started late here in Belgium and ended very soon. Cold weather during the months of March and April resulted in postponing the very early ones by nearly 14 days. The very earliest one is a *P. daurica* seedling which flowered April 9th last year and took another 11 days to flower on April 20 this year. At around the same time my replanted divisions of *P. mascula bodurii* flowered. These have very sturdy stems and seem to tolerate our weather very well. They are described as white, but there's some cream and green to it as well. It's obvious that *P. mascula hellenica* is a far prettier plant, but *bodurii* is about a week earlier and far easier to grow, I think it could be one to recommend to any average gardener (once it becomes more easily available).

*P. mascula bodurii*

At the same time I could harvest my first cutflowers from my plastic greenhouses. To show that not all goes according to plan, here's a picture of my Coral Charms and their rendez-vous with an unwanted guest named botrytis. Last year's stems hadn't been removed and thus the disease had a great time...

Coral Charm with botrytis infection

Coral Charm stems with botrytis

The greyish-white botrytis spores clearly visible at the bottom

That's not the only problem that occurred this year. I have fields of peony that have been planted in different years. A field that was planted three years ago with many different cultivars did very well, but upon closer inspection there was an issue with leaf nematodes (*aphelenchoides fragariae*, there's another longer article on the website about them). When I planted this field all divisions did receive a hot water treatment to get rid of this pest. But I received three plants from another peony friend after I had given the hot water treatment. I could not start the procedure again for just three divisions and thus planted them with the others. The first year those three plants hardly flowered, but them being first year plants, nothing uncommon of course. Last year however, it was clear that they had problems with leaf nematodes as most stems didn't give any flowers at all, whilst all other plants standing around them were perfectly fine. But as is the case with leaf nematodes, they spread from plant to plant during periods of rain or damp weather and this year in more or less a perfect circle around those three plants, several plants of other cultivars were infected as well and showed symptoms that I didn't like and that most readers won't like as well. Some cultivars are less susceptible than others and thus the degree of severity differs somewhat but alas, none proved to be fully resistant. See the pictures to know what I'm speaking of, there are also some pictures of plants of the same varieties that are still perfectly healthy, and these plants just happen to be only 1 meter (3 feet) further away from the infected plants, no doubt they would show disease symptoms next year if I were to let them grow there (but all shall be dug, divided and will receive their hot water cure).

The culprits that didn't receive their hot water treatment

Color Magnet infected and healthy side by side

Infected Color Magnet

Healthy Color Magnet

Fringed Ivory infected

Fringed Ivory healthy

Don Richardson infected

Don Richardson healthy

Looking close at some peonies, sometimes you see something you hadn't noticed before. Lavender Baby, that rare Lavender seedling from an open pollinated seed, has very deeply divided foliage. Having read some more about species peonies I am wondering whether *P. officinalis* in one or other form would not be the pollen parent? There's a *P. officinalis* plant growing here, but it's not doing very well, whilst Lavender Baby with more or less the same foliage is simply a standout when it comes to health and good growth. What I have also noticed this year is the difference between *P. emodi* and Early Windflower / Late Windflower, but you can read a longer article about that elsewhere on the site.

Lavender Baby leaf

The first excellent early cutflower this year was Vanilla Schnapps, unfortunately I couldn't cut any as they are still being propagated, but I was able to use them for pollinating. During the beginning of the flowering season I still have time to make some crosses, thus Vanilla Schnapps is one of my favorites for this purpose. Together with Grand Massive and some early seedlings they have been used extensively this year, hopefully something nice comes from it. Most of them have been pollinated with PVBM003 (Pink Vanguard x Buoy Master, selection 3) which is the best plant I have produced thus far, very early with stems as sturdy as Old Faithful. I've also used some pollen that peony friends sent me, Ruud Warmerdam gave me some Anika, a very early flowering plant, and from Hans Maschke I got some pollen from *P. parnassica*, that rare deep red species. Since both plants are so difficult to obtain, I've used the pollen to the last grain on several fertile hybrids, we'll see what results from it.

*P. parnassica* (picture from H. Maschke)

Something else that I noticed are the so-called 'open buds' (where the outer petals are too short to cover the inner petals/stamens/carpels) and which tend to result in flowers with rotten stamens when the weather is not dry enough. Moonrise, a plant of which I used to have several hundreds, has this deficiency, but it is hardly alone. New and rare cultivars are also sometimes prone to it, Triphena Parkin for example showed it as well on some flowers (whilst on others not). It must have something to do with the cold. Vanilla Schnapps which I had growing at three different places, grew perfectly well in two sheltered positions with perfectly formed buds, whilst at the third location many open buds occurred, a first for this cultivar. This last location was unsheltered, thus usually a few degrees cooler and I've also noticed that even here the sidebuds, which flower later, were again perfectly formed. It needs further study of course, but I tend to shy away from cultivars that show this phenomenon quite often.

An 'open' bud of Moonrise

An 'open' bud of Triphena Parkin

From the newer cultivars that I hadn't seen many times before two stood out from the rest: Just Peachy (see another article) and Dipple Gowt. The latter is from the cross *P. Nilitz* (an advanced hybrid) x *P. obovata* subsp. *willmottiae*. There aren't too many hybrids with *obovata* in their background, Saunders introduced Silver Dawn, whose offspring was used to produce such lovely things as Sunny Girl, Greenland and Lois' Choice. It's nice to have something else with this much *obovata* genetics in it (as *obovata* tends to grow well in some shadow, thus opening new opportunities). The stems aren't the sturdiest, though they are sufficient to hold the semi-double to double flowers. The foliage is very shining green and looks extremely healthy. Harald Fawknor, the breeder of this plant, remarks that it is very fertile and gives ample seed, we'll see what the combination of Dipple Gowt x *P. parnassica* will give...

Dipple Gowt plant habit

Dipple Gowt bud

Dipple Gowt flower

After this one flowered the real cutting season began, with very warm weather and rain torrents in between, not the best combination I must say, the older cultivars were simply left to flower on the plants as I only had enough time to harvest the better newer cultivars. With so many peony stems to market (other growers experienced the same weather, Holland is close by with their millions of peony stems growing) prices were not spectacular this year, but fortunately the cultivars distinct enough still did quite well. The Fawn and Amalia Olson are two cultivars of which I grow a lot and both did very fine this year, with lots of stems.

Amalia Olson

The Fawn

There are some other cultivars that surprised me in a positive way. Prairie Butterflies turned out to be a very large, tall, sturdy and healthy plant with very attractive flowers, somewhat in the colour range of Athena, but darker pink and much more impressive. White Frost seems to be an excellent double white garden plant, the stems are very sturdy and the flowers very attractive whilst their fragrance is extremely strong (and very likeable), the only plant I could smell from a distance when the flowers were open. The buds are too pink and not perfectly formed, thus as a cutflower they would not do well, but for the garden it must be one of the very best. And Tranquil Dove was very attractive this year, as it usually is, with the pink picotee edges, it's a far better plant than the comparable Picotee.

Prairie Butterflies

White Frost

Tranquil Dove

Tranquil Dove

The peony season is now over, we can do one last experiment with Canary Brilliants. A few years ago we had a severe hailstorm at the end of the peony flowering season which devastated my peony fields that year (and some other things as well). There wasn't any foliage left over on my peonies, but one cultivar (from over 300 at the time) restarted growth and flowered again in July. That cultivar was the intersectional (or ITOH if you so like) Canary Brilliants, thus this time I'm trying to repeat this phenomenon, there might be a niche market for it...

Canary Brilliants

So that was my peony season in short, if you'd like to tell about yours, feel free to do so, it's not my intention to write most of the articles on the website as it's meant to let all people share their peony experiences. The comments section is yours, but so is the forum and you can even write an article for the 'magazine' yourself, so why not tell about your own peonies?