

"SERENDIPITY"

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This double white lactiflora peony from an open pollinated seed from Carl G. Klehm is arguably my favorite double white lactiflora that can be used as a cutflower. I got a few seeds from Carl G. Klehm that grew into mature plants, but this was the only remarkable one. It's no good as a garden plant unfortunately. The foliage is not particularly attractive (somewhat open and the very lower part of the stem has none), but most importantly during rain and wind the open flowers will be too heavy for the stems to carry them well.



But as a cutflower I know of no better double white. We've just summed up the cons that make it unfit for your garden, but here are the pros as I see them:

- it has a rose-form flower and not a bomb-form, the former is generally preferred over the latter
- the buds are quite large, not as large as Bowl of Cream, but far larger than Duchesse de Nemours
- the buds are pure white in bud and are closed, thus bud presentation is excellent



- the stems are very tall, easily reaching over 1 m and thus the requested 60 cm can easily be cut, leaving enough foliage for good growth of the plant
- a large number of stems, before digging and dividing it had 19 stems
- the flowers are pure white with a hint of yellow towards the base of the petals, very occasionally there are some red markings present



-the flowers are large

-they have a very, very strong agreeable fragrance. Although it cannot compete with the double pink Myrtle Gentry, the absolute queen of fragrance, it surely ranks among the most fragrant whites.

-no matter how tightly closed the buds are when cut, they will always open well

-there are 2-3 sidebuds on average, but disbudding them is discouraged simply because these sidebuds will also open perfectly well. The following picture shows a flower that was cut when then the main bud was still closed. That main flower opened well, but to my surprise then, the sidebuds also opened as well, from the first to the last, although less double; something I had never seen before. This is extremely important for a good cutflower, there are only a few peony varieties that always open well from tight buds (and many of those tend to have a short vase-life unfortunately, not a problem here). When florists are surveyed about the good and bad about peonies, one main issue always comes to the fore: peonies that don't open well. The main offender is Sarah Bernhardt, which has to be cut rather late. A customer that buys a peony that doesn't open well is unlikely to revisit... So peonies that always open well have a bright future ahead if you'd ask me.



-it propagates readily, the first time dividing it (Fall 2017) gave me 12 divisions (some small, some large)

-its flowering time is rather early, just after Miss America

It's fair to say that we have high hopes for this one. I've provisionally named it 'Serendipity' as this one was in fact only found by sheer accident, I was not trying to find a double white, but here it is. Of course we'll need to observe it further the following years to see whether it's not overly susceptible to diseases, and if it's reliable from year to year.

If you know of an excellent double white variety that you think of as excellent for cutflowers, I'm always happy to hear about it. I grow quite a few double white varieties, but it seems there's always something to nag about (pink buds, too short, lax stems, needs to be cut when nearly open, too few stems, etcetera, etcetera...)