

PAEONIA QIUI

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Paeonia qiui (footnote: Hong, De-Yuan. "Peonies of the World. Taxonomy and phytogeography." Kew: Royal Botanic Gardens, 2010, pp. 91-92.)

Shrubs up to 1.2 m tall. Roots up to 2 cm in diameter, cylindrical, attenuate downwards. Stems grey or brown-grey, longitudinally striate. Lower leaves biternate, always with 9 leaflets; leaflets often reddish above, mostly ovate, less frequently ovate—lanceolate or ovate-orbicular, rounded at the base, obtuse or acute at the apex, mostly entire, sometimes terminal leaflets shallowly 3-lobed, 4-12 cm long, 2—8 cm wide, usually glabrous above, densely villose at axils of major veins beneath. Flowers solitary, terminal; involucre bracts 2-4 in number, leaf-like; sepals mostly 3, rarely 2 or 4 in number, yellow green, acute or caudate at the apex, the inner one the largest, 2.5-3 cm long, 2-2.5 cm wide; petals 5—9 in number, spreading, pink or pale pink, often with a pale red spot at the base, 3.5—5.5 cm long, 2—3.1 cm wide; filaments pale pink to pink; anthers yellow; disk entirely enveloping carpels at anthesis, red—purple, leathery; carpels 5, densely tomentose; stigmas sessile, red, 1.5-2 mm wide. Follicles ellipsoid, densely brown-yellow tomentose, 2—2.8 cm long. Seeds black, glossy, 6-8 mm long, 5-7 mm in diameter.

Chromosome number: $2n = 10$ (diploid)

Mostly in deciduous broad-leaved forests, rarely on sunny grassy slopes, on limestone rocks or cliffs, at altitudes of 1,000—2,200 m. Confined to W Henan (Xixia County) and W Hubei (Baokang County and Shennongjia).

To date, *Paeonia qiui* has been found in only four localities. Three of the four remaining populations were found on cliffs and comprised only a few individuals. It is surely the most endangered species in *Paeonia*, on the verge of extinction, and therefore effective measures must be undertaken urgently to conserve the species. Prof LI Zhen-Yu informed me recently that he saw this species with certainty in Zhuxi County of Hubei Province.

Paeonia qiui is characterised by having biternate lower leaves consistently with 9 leaflets, which are ovate-lanceolate to broad-ovate, mostly entire and densely villose at the axils of major veins beneath. It has whitish pink or pink petals, often with a pale red blotch at the base. Apparently, *P. qiui* is most closely related to *P. cathayana* and *P. jishanensis*. It sometimes reproduces vegetatively by turions.

Images by [Dick Westland](#)