



AMERICAN Peony Society Bulletin



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This will be my final message, and I look back on two years that have passed with what seems like the speed of light. During these two years the Society has grown in membership, in financial strength, has held two more successful exhibitions, has offered interesting publications, and has steadily registered new and exciting varieties of peonies. It gives a great sense of satisfaction to have been a part of all this, and it has been an honor to serve the Society.

It is now time for my annual exhortation: By the time you read this you should have made your plans to attend the Annual Exhibition at Kingwood Center, a beautiful and interesting location, in Mansfield, Ohio, on June 4, 5, & 6th, 1993. I urge all Ohio members especially, as well as those in neighboring states to not only attend, but also to bring some peony blossoms you are particularly pleased with, even if only a few, and place them in the exhibition. I promise you it will add a new dimension to the pleasure of simply viewing the many beautiful blooms, and a satisfaction that can be obtained in no other way.

I look forward to greeting you all in June at Kingwood!

Robert F. Schmidt

Cover Pictures:

These majestic peony gardens are part of a private planting, and the owner wishes to remain anonymous. We thank him for letting us use his beautiful photographs in the BULLETIN.

Commemorating the 90th year of the American Peony Society

FROM THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEONY SOCIETY

Written by A. P. Saunders, 1928

The growth of the Society through those early years was very slow by comparison with the large annual increase in later times. Beginning with only thirty-seven members in 1903, it had increased by 1912 to nearly a hundred, including most of the important growers in the country, both professional and amateur.

The exhibitions held in conjunction with the annual meetings had proved a useful adjunct to the work done in the fields at Cornell. For in these exhibitions were to be seen well-staged blooms of most of the standard varieties, from which anyone in doubt as to the authenticity of his own stock might resolve his uncertainties. The entries at those early shows were indeed few and small compared to what we see nowadays. The entire stretch of one of them would occupy scarcely a corner in one of the great halls which are filled by our present-day exhibitions. Yet we enjoyed them and learned much from them. They were a gathering of friends sharing a common enthusiasm rather than a great spectacle for the public.

Mr. Ward's presidency lasted from the founding of the Society, in 1903, until 1909 when he was obliged by ill health to resign office. In recognition of his great services to the Society, he was then made Honorary President, so that the Society might still have the benefit of his cooperation and interest. He remained in this relation to the Society until his death in 1920.

Mr. Farr succeeded him and occupied the presidency until 1917. Mr. A. H. Fewkes was the Society's Secretary from the first year until 1911. Thus Mr. Ward and Mr. Fewkes were in office together through all the early formative years, and we may well be grateful that the policies of the Society were determined by men like these, men to whom the peony was, it is true, business, but also something far more than that—a life enthusiasm, and, indeed, one may say a passion. The general influence of the Society, and particularly the work of the Nomenclature Committee, began to bear fruit at just about the time when Mr. Fewkes gave up the secretaryship; and the rapid growth in membership and the enormous increase in the popularity of the peony in America are in large measure due to the wise judgment and disinterested devotion of the men who organized the Society and first started it on its way, even if they did not in their terms of office see the full results of their efforts.

But with these two, Mr. Ward and Mr. Fewkes, must always be

remembered Mr. Farr, who did more than anyone else, perhaps, to make the peony known and appreciated by the gardening public in this country.

The present writer succeeded Mr. Fewkes in the Secretary's office in 1911 and continued to occupy it until 1924, when he was succeeded by Mr. W. F. Christman. The Society was, in 1911, entering upon a period of more rapid growth, and the idea was in the air that there should be some medium of communication between peony-growers which might serve also as the official organ of the Society. To this end there appeared in 1915 the first number of the "Bulletin of Peony News." It has gone on from that time, and the thirty-second number, under the more appropriate name "American Peony Society Bulletin," was published in November, 1927. The editorship of the Bulletin has always been in the hands of the Secretary, and a good deal of each issue has been from his pen, though many valuable contributions on different aspects of peony culture have been contributed by members of the Society in America and abroad.

At the time when the Bulletin began to appear, peony culture was entering on a new phase in America. When the Society was founded, almost all the varieties generally in commerce here were of French origin. There were only a very few which had originated in America, for with the exception of John Richardson, there was no one in America, previous to 1900, who had added any varieties of much importance. But about the time when the Society was organized, new varieties began to appear from the hands of American growers, first from H. A. Terry, C. S. Harrison, George Hollis, A. M. Brand, J. F. Rosenfield, and Mrs. Pleas, and later from T. C. Thurlow's Sons, E. J. Shaylor, and others. Now, almost every year sees additions, not only to the list of named peonies but to the list of names of introducers of peonies. More than 275 new named varieties have been added in this country within twenty-five years. Many of these, it must be said, were not of a quality to justify their introduction into commerce, but a fair proportion of them were of such beauty as to challenge the best of the importations from Europe where the genius of Lemoine and Dessert was still active in the production of varieties of supreme quality.

NOTE: Mr. Christman served as Secretary from 1924-1951, then followed by Mr. George Peyton from 1951-1964 because of ill health. Mr. and Mrs. Dan Pennell became Secretary from 1965-1970. At that time, they were succeeded by Greta M. Kessenich from 1971 and continuing, 1993.

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF TREE PEONIES (BOTAN) IN JAPAN

by Sadao Itoh, Yokkaichi, Japan

This short paper deals with the history of Botan (Tree Peonies) in Japan. I would also like to speak about how Japanese people feel about art and cultivation of Botan. It is not certain just when the Botan came to Japan from China because there is no documentation on this point. It is generally thought that this happened in the Seventh Century A.D. in the Nara Period or the period preceding it. At that date the Japanese had not yet developed a taste for using flowers for decoration and admiration for their beauty. At first plants were used in the domestic economy, as building material, as fuel, as food, as medicine or as dye-stuff. Botan had a medicinal use. The skin of the root was dried and used as a pain killer. It was also used for treating women's ailments.

The earliest reference to "Botan" in literature occurs in *Izumo Fudoki*, a description of the natural features of Izumo which is now Simane Prefecture. It was compiled in 733 and Botan was described in it as a medicinal plant. Since that time the Botan has always been closely associated with Shimane. At present, Shimane is one of the biggest Botan-plant producing centers in Japan together with Niigata. In the Tenth or Eleventh Century, the Heian Period, the Botan was sometimes mentioned in the literature of the Imperial Court, for instance in the *Pillow Book*, *Makura-no-Soshi* of Sei-Shonagon who was an influential woman in the cultural service for the Empress. At that time the Botan was too flamboyant to please popular taste, native Japanese flowers such as Wisteria and Cherry Blossom being preferred. To Sei-Shonagon, the Botan was a strange un-Japanese flower. The Japanese had not yet developed a liking for the foreign Botan. *Kagero Nikki*, a diary of a noblewoman, also in the Heian Period, speaks of Botan. She sought to use the Botan as an expression of the feelings of men and women towards one another. The Botan at the height of its beauty suggested the happiness of a woman with her lover. The fading flower evoked the sorrow of a woman abandoned by her lover. It is surprising that in the *Tale of Genji*, it is so full of interesting detail about gardens. Its author, Murasaki Shikibu, never mentions the Botan, because the Botan was against her ideas and feelings as she expressed them.

During the Heian Period, the medicinal use of the Botan was the subject of the governmental regulations issued in 967. At this time the Botan was found only in Temples or those of Aristocratic families. The Aristocracy no longer wielded real political power. After the Heian Period this had now passed to the Samurai, or warriors, and they were not interested in flowers. The Priesthood, on the other hand, preferred calligraphy, painting or drinking tea. They were not

interested in the beauty of the Botan as a living flower.

After the time of the Samurai there followed the Civil Wars. New leaders sprang up from other ranks of society. These men used the Botan as a symbol of power. It was large, gorgeous and colourful! They decorated the rooms of their Castles with large paintings of Botan, which became known as 'The King of Flowers,' and was sometimes associated in art with the Lion, 'The King of Animals.'

There now began the long period of Feudal Government under the Tokugawa Shogun, lasting from 1600 to 1868. This was a period of fairly constant peace and stability. More and more people were able to devote their time to the cultivation of flowers. Gardening became an occupation of ordinary people and this, of course, included Botan. Enthusiastic cultivators of Botan tried to obtain new and more beautiful varieties. At this time the number of varieties in existence reached its maximum, probably between four and five hundred. During this period the so-called Kan Botan were discovered. These are remontant Peonies which flower in Spring and again in the following Winter. White flowers were particularly popular at this time and about two hundred white Botan were in cultivation.

In 1695 a cultivator of flowering plants, Ihei Itoh—no relation of mine—published a book about their varieties and cultivation. This work is now highly evaluated in Japan as a classical horticultural book. The varieties and appreciation of Botan are also mentioned in detail in it. It is called *Kadan Jikinsho*, has now been reprinted, and is available in Japan.

After the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate, under the Meiji government, money was available mainly for the Army and for the modernization of Japan, interest in Botan declined, and only a limited number of people continued to cultivate them. During the Second World War the emphasis was on food production and many collections of Botan were lost. In recent years, with the rapid growth of the Japanese economy, and the rise in the standard of living, appreciation of flowers and interest in cultivating them has revived and is growing rapidly. The present era of peace and prosperity had enabled people to turn their thoughts to the appreciation of nature and all that is connected with it. Since the Second World War, an important breakthrough has been the breeding by Toichi Itoh of hybrids between the yellow Paeonia of the Himalaya and Japanese Herbaceous Peonies. This has led to a new race of Peonies different from anything known before.

During the past two centuries the cultivation of Botan has been introduced in Europe and the United States, first from China and later from Japan. In addition, new species of peony have been discovered in the Himalaya and brought to cultivation. Both in Japan and in Europe, and America, the breeding of new varieties has been carried on by specialists, with the evolution of many new and splendid

plants. In this way, a plant which had a history of many centuries in Japan is now widespread, and well known amongst horticulturists in many countries.

LANDSCAPE PLACEMENT OF PEONIES

by Don Hollingsworth, Kansas City, Missouri, #258, June 1986

Growing peonies and seeing them flower is a sufficient joy of itself for many plant lovers. How and where they fit into the surroundings may be of little concern.

On the other hand, interior and exterior decoration is a popular theme in our culture and the idea of creating beauty is well established as a loftier goal. For this or other, perhaps more basic, reasons, some of us are uncomfortable unless we have applied a measure of logic and form in deciding where to place the items which we add to our surroundings. Picking the placement of our peony plants can become a matter of creative interest. The purpose of this article is to offer one man's thoughts on ways to approach the task.

First, there is the more mundane, but essential matter of what it takes to produce fine peony flowers. The site is an important part of success. Peonies want a fertile soil—this means a good level of humus, as well as mineral fertility—and the site must be well-drained. The latter is necessary because peonies cannot survive poor aeration of the soil around the roots. Thus, placement of peonies in many locations can require considerable soil modification, if they are to have a chance to perform in the manner we expect of them. It is also important to start with healthy, vigorous divisions. The smaller the division, the more important it is that optimum growing circumstances be provided (this is where the idea of "nursery" comes in, a place where small plants or propagation pieces can be carried to a better planting-out size). Peonies usually perform best when cultivated, reducing competition.

Another consideration in growing peonies that should be emphasized is that of keeping the foliage and stems free of fungus diseases. One reason is that the quality of flowering depends on the amount of growth in the storage roots the summer before. Loss of leaf surface to fungus infections reduces the rate of food production. In many sections of the world where peonies are grown, climate conditions are favorable to the infection and spread of leaf diseases. While these leaf infections rarely destroy plants in one season, they can be responsible for decline over several seasons. Fungi are also responsible for root rot, which can lead to destruction in one season.

The importance of plant health in landscape appearance cannot be over-emphasized. While the autumnal decline of foliage is quite compatible with landscape appearance, unseasonal death of foliage is distracting.

Some peonies inherently decline in midsummer, somewhat as daf-

fodils and other spring bulbs, although usually later. The Officinalis and Lobata Hybrids are notable groups which tend to this pattern of growth. Since peonies are a factor in border height and provide background for other plants in certain situations, one needs to anticipate whether the variety being placed will cause an unwanted "hole" to come in the border when the foliage goes bad. A more dramatic illustration of this problem can be envisioned in a row of peonies, say along the side of the front yard, where you mostly have plants of Chinese peonies (*Paeonia lactiflora*) which hold their foliage right into autumn in most varieties, but with one or more Lobata of Perry Hybrids, most of which tend to die-back in mid-summer. Sometime before autumn the hybrid foliage will naturally decline. When you groom the border by taking out the spent stems, there is a "hole" in your row. You can prevent this at planting time and still not give up having the beautiful hybrid colors at flowering. Simply put the hybrids on one end of the row. When the offending foliage is groomed out, everything looks about the same, except the row is shorter for the balance of the season.

Cut-flowers may be most conveniently grown on peony plants placed in "island" beds in a utility area, as one does with a vegetable plot, out of the public portion of the grounds. The big double peony flowers may be spoiled by rain, their stems broken down due to water-logged flowers, as well as the flower life being shortened. Grown in a cut-flower area, the blossoms can be freely cut and taken indoors, without diminishing the publicly viewed borders. Of course, big flowered peonies in public areas can be given extra support and their appearance thereby largely preserved out-of-doors, even in rainy weather.

Choose varieties which are less vulnerable to rain damage for easiest maintenance of border appearance. Those which bear their flowers closest to the bush are not so vulnerable to stem breakage by water-logged flowers. Also, some varieties are notably better equipped to resist stem leaning or breakage. The less double forms are not prone to hold great quantities of water. The single and Japanese flower forms are best in this respect. However, the bomb double form presents a nice compromise, having a more single form on first opening, but taking on the large size of the full doubles as the flower matures. Also, the fact of the bomb form growing over a period of several days gives extra interest in the border.

Flower color is a factor in border appearance. In light colors of white, blush, light pink, and yellows, the large flowers of peonies are notable at relatively great viewing distances. At similar distance some of the red flowers may go nearly unnoticed. Most photography buffs have had the experience of taking a black and white photo of a gorgeous red peony and have seen the red show up as black holes in the greys of the foliage. This is similar to the effect of viewing them at longer distances in the landscape. Place the red flowering choices at the near locations and limit the longer views to the lighter colored

forms. This principle can be applied to distant borders. For example, walking through a large garden, as one comes around an out-curve of shrubbery, the near peonies might be red.

Color enthusiasts are sometimes interested in weaving subtle color sequences into their landscape borders. This is an obvious challenge, since one will have to collect knowledge and experience in not only color of specific varieties, but the timing of flowering, etc. Whether or not one is approaching this advanced challenge in border arrangement, it may be of interest to note that both blue-based reds and yellow-based reds occur in peony flowers. The range and variety of reds have been expanded immensely with the production of interspecies hybrids. These reds appear both as entire colored flowers, as is widely known, and as the pigment of the subtle markings in the fascinating range of pastel colors which have appeared among the modern hybrids. These pastel variations are of great interest to some flower arrangers, but they so far occur most prevalently in less double forms, therefore fitting nicely into the logic of selecting peonies for landscape borders.

It is perhaps obvious, but nevertheless of great importance, in the landscape placement of peonies to keep in mind where they fit into the structural design hierarchy of plants. It is the woody plants which stand highest in this hierarchy. Trees are the most dominant, grading down to the finest textured twiggy shrubs. The trees and larger shrubs give the height and enclosure functions in landscape design. Herbaceous plants contribute filler and color. While the tree peonies are shrubs, they are not strong structural contributors. Herbaceous peonies are of strong texture and fairly massive among the non-shrub plants. Most peonies including tree peonies come into use as facers for intermediate shrubs. They may provide transition areas to lesser-texture border plants or may be a major factor throughout a border. The latter application is well known by peony fanciers—we are continually running out of space for our latest additions!

While structural elements which give height and enclosure are extremely valuable in landscape good appearance, it is not necessary to obtain all of this with living materials. When space is at a premium in a key location, it may be impossible to both give room for background plants for your peonies to be seen against, and have room for the peonies. Consider a fence of boards or other suitable materials. This can be combined with appropriate shrubbery for border ends. A nice feature of the fence is that it is the right size when placed. Another is that it does not compete for moisture and soil.

Peonies can be used in an infinite array of situations in the home garden and institutional plantings. How one chooses to use them is an individual choice. When given growing conditions which are suitable to their needs, peonies will perform the beautiful flowering for which they are desired. How much more complex one may wish to make the task of weaving them into their larger surrounding can be as challenging and delightful as it takes to meet one's fancy!

REGISTRATIONS

Crimson Classic—1976 (Chris Laning, Kalamazoo, Michigan).
Seedling #114—**Sable** x "Super D."

The plant is tall (39") with dark red flowers, single, which are fertile tetraploids.

Parentage—**Sable** is Lyman Glascock, 1949, blackish red single—"Super D" is a big beautiful white double by Roy Pehrson.

Early Star—April 14, 1993 (Don Hollingsworth). Seedling number 676.

Parentage, seed of Saunders 4992 by pollen of a Saunder seedling of **Roselette's Child**. Bloomed before 1980.

Early pastel hybrid type, single, pale yellow to ivory white with red stigmas, very early, medium height. Floriferous, reliable, cupped six-inch flower with large center of stamens, broad bush, leaflets long and impress-veined, remains green into autumn. Seeds and pollen, fairly fast increase.

Lavon—April 14, 1993 (Don Hollingsworth). Seedling # Hollingsworth 1859. Parentage **Nippon Gold** x **Cytherea**.

Bloomed before 1980. Lacti type of hybrid origin, high built, full double flower of medium pink and medium yellow, two-tone, mild fragrance late midseason. Large flower, yellow staminodes make up a prominent collar and are repeated at center of open flower. Long stems, good cutting flower. Moderate increase, reliable. Strong stems. Flower displayed well above the foliage.

Award of Merit 1992.

★ ★ ★ ★

PEONIES IN GREAT BRITAIN

I have grown cut flowers commercially for 40 years and the peony is still the one that gives me the thrill of the season. My son-in-law is responsible for the farm now, but I still help with the flowers during the peony season. I do most of the packing in cardboard boxes, 60-80 a day, with 18 to 20 bunches of five per box.

We have had a mild winter, so there's frost yet (Jan. 31, 1993)—nemesia, daffodils, viburnum, and anemones are all in full bloom. Willowherb and annual grass are a problem in the peony fields because of the wet mild weather.

—Mr. Theo Person, Jersey, Great Britain

"Patience is the prime requisite to successful peony culture."

★ ★ ★ ★

***If you cut a tree, plant a tree.
It is nature's replaceable energy.***

THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Board of Directors, having served their term of office, expires in June 1993.

Namely: John Elsley, John E. Simkins, W. G. Sindt, Leila Bradfield, Frank Howell and Peter C. Laning.

There will be two vacancies: John Elsley and W. G. Sindt. Mr. Sindt has served as a member of this governing Board since 1966 and, because of health problems, is resigning. Mr. Robert Wise of Sidney, Ohio and Alvin Sevald of Minneapolis, Minnesota have been selected to fill the two vacancies.

These two names and the names of those remaining will be placed in nomination for the term of three years, at the annual meeting June 5, in Mansfield, Ohio.

Robert G. Wise grows many peonies as a hobby, experienced in seed growing of peonies. He has written articles for the Bulletin, attends Conventions, and exhibits his peonies. Now that time permits, more time will be given his garden of peonies.



Alvin Sevald grew up in the fertile farmland of northwestern Minnesota, and has always had a love for the soil, although much of his life has been spent in the city. After high school, he tried going to school in Minneapolis, but was very homesick. He remembers hurrying across a busy street one day to a store that had a big sign saying "Fanny Farmer," and was very disappointed to find only candy—not a single farm magazine.

Along with his wife, Judy, and son, Jonathan, he now operates the Sevald Nursery, specializing in peonies, and using mostly organic fertilizers. At present, his favorite mix is two large shovels of compost, one shovel of wood ashes, a cup of bone meal, and a half-cup of cotton seed meal worked into the soil around each established plant, applied at three-year intervals. When time permits, a foliar enzyme is sprayed on the plants each Spring. These enzymes enable plants to make better use of nutrients. The wood ashes provide potash, and its high PH serves as a balance against the low PH of the cotton seed meal; the bone meal provides phosphorus and calcium; the cotton seed meal is a good source of slow release, non-burning nitrogen.

With other members of the Minnesota Peony Society, Alvin is in charge of and is working with the Lowry Hill Historical Society and the Minneapolis Park Board, to establish a large peony planting within walking distance of the Guthrie Theater and the Walker Art Center, near Downtown Minneapolis.

FRANCE CELEBRATES THE PEONY

Leo Fernig, Lucinges, Bonne, France

1992 was a good year for peonies in France—maybe not so much from a gardening point of view, since a cold wet Spring followed by a hot dry Summer made the flowering season short—but I am thinking rather of public recognition for our favorite flower.

From May 7 to May 17, 1992, an exhibition of peonies was presented at the Bagatelle Garden in the Bois de Boulogne of Paris. The City Hall, through its Department of Parks and Gardens, took the initiative of organizing this public tribute to peonies, the title chosen being "Pivoines en folies." This makes one think of the Folies Bergères and of Ziegfield, but my dictionary tells me that a garden folly was an eye-catcher when introduced in the 18th century, a kind of garden design characterized by "a certain excess in terms of eccentricity, cost, or conspicuous inutility."

Well! But it seems appropriate that the Bagatelle, itself an history folly from the mid-18th century, should be the site of this exhibition, the first of its kind in France. The planning and preparation of the event took almost two years. The central area, the court of honor in front of the chateau, was divided into a dozen small gardens where clumps of peonies were placed along with the existing other plants, the stones and pools. In all, about 2,000 herbaceous peonies, in 50 varieties, were on display. They had been selected and carefully grown in pots the year before by Michel Riviere at his nursery, and transferred to the Bagatelle beds in the cold, damp week preceding the exhibition. They flowered cautiously on the opening day, but a welcome warm spell thereafter gave the visiting public a splendid view of what the old and modern cultivars have to offer.

In the hall under the Bagatelle terrace came the complement: the latest photographs by Sir Peter Smithers of Japanese tree peony flowers. As members of the American Peony Society know, Sir Peter combines to remarkable degree the skill of a gardener with the artistic ability to capture "the beauty and mystery which he perceives in the living flower." His pictures, in a square metre format, were set out along the two long walls of the fairly narrow hall and drew a large admiring crowd. At the entrance, guarded by a gendarme, the guest of honor was placed on a table, Sir Peter's latest camera, handmade from wood and brass in Vermont with optical equipment from Switzerland.

Behind the chateau there is one of the permanent garden beds of the Bagatelle, which has for many years been devoted to peonies. Although it hadn't been spruced up or prepared for the special occasion, it presented well; the bed must contain about 150 different varieties, old and new, and we saw a splendid old bush of **Mai Fleuri** in full flower, along with the tree peony **Hana Kisoï**, **Duchesse de**

Nemours, Baroness Schroeder, Kansas, Bonanza, a good international collection—not forgetting the double red officinalis which for centuries has grown in European cottage gardens, and is affectionately nicknamed *L'ivrogne*, the drunkard, by the French. As a result of the exhibition, this bed is to be further enlarged, and any APS members who may be visiting Paris at the right season in years to come will be well advised to include the Bagatelle in their itinerary.

Within the chateau itself a number of the ground-floor rooms were given over to further aspects of the peony: cut-flowers for sale, posters, pictures, various souvenirs of a visit to the exhibition. A series of public lectures were offered in another of the halls, when Michel Riviere and Sir Peter were the main speakers on peony history and cultivation, with some specialists from the City Parks and Gardens Department and the national Horticultural Society dealing with horticultural questions.

This Parisian fortnight devoted to peonies was launched by a ceremony at the Hotel-de-Ville on May 6, where the deputy to the Mayor, the lady responsible for parks, gardens and environmental matters, presented the vermeil medal of the City to Sir Peter and Michel Riviere. Both of them had contributed a great deal to making the exhibition possible, and the awards were a recognition also of their unique contributions to horticulture. Press coverage of the ceremony played a part in ensuring the good attendance at the exhibition in subsequent days.

So much, then, for our Spring events in Paris. Much later in the year, as Winter came, Michel Riviere's book on peonies was finally published. I say finally, because I'd been aware of the long period of several years that went into the research and writing of the book, when Michel had to operate and manage his nursery almost single-handed, then move the entire stock of peonies to a new site to the south in the valley of the Drome, finding time, nevertheless, to continue working on his book. At last, he completed the manuscript and found a publisher. Entitled *Le Monde fabuleux des Pivoines*, published by Floraprint France, with the ISBN 2-900069-35-1, the book runs to 192 pages.

A short review might be in order, for readers who can manage French, and in fact, with technical material like this, everyone who has school-level French ought to be able to make out—this is a good opportunity to brush up. The book combines a direct botanic account of the species in the genus; the history of peony cultivation down to the present day; planting, care and multiplication of peonies; recommended varieties. The first half of the volume is devoted to tree peonies and makes available to French gardeners the first notes I have seen on the modern work of the American hybridists. In the second half, herbaceous peonies, we have a unique set of data on the

French nurserymen who in the last century did so much to produce new lactiflora varieties and hybridize the other species. The text of the book is based on personal research (into early records and so on) as well as on practical experience in the nursery. It is presented in a straightforward and simple manner, so as to be useful to the amateur gardener while offering much of interest to a more specialized reader. The illustrations to this text form a worthwhile book by themselves: over a dozen of Sir Peter Smithers' photographs of tree peonies, watercolors and drawings by the artist Jacqueline Farvacques, and very copious photos by the two Rivières, father and son, no mean photographers in their own right.

★ ★ ★ ★

PEONIES

C. M. Clarke, Tepee Creek, Alberta, Canada

(Mr. Clarke is one of our peony Greats in the early days of peony growing. His entire life was given to the study and cultivation of the peony. This is one of many of his writings, with timely information.—*Editor*)

No other perennial that can be grown in the Peace River District will give gardeners so much satisfaction as the peony. Long-lived, thoroughly hardy, requiring no protection whatever even in the severest winter, almost immune to insect pests, subject to few diseases, its culture is simple and very easy compared with that of the rose, whose blooms it surpasses in size and in variations of form, at least equals in beauty of form and of color, and very nearly equals in fragrance. Its only disadvantage is a short flowering season, individual plants remaining in bloom for little more than two weeks only, but where space and means allow, by a careful selection of early, midseason and late varieties, peony blooms can be enjoyed in the garden for about eight weeks, from early June to the end of July. By cutting them at the proper stage and storing them at 35 to 40 degrees they can be made available for use indoors for several weeks longer.

SPECIES AND VARIETIES IN CULTIVATION AND BLOOMING SEASON

Of the three species commonly found in gardens, the fernleaf peony (*Paeonia tenuifolia*) is earliest. It is a dwarf species with very narrow leaves and bright crimson flowers that open here about the first of June, and it can be had in both single and double forms.

Next in order of earliness is the old-fashioned peony (*Paeonia officinalis*) that was grown almost exclusively in our grandmother's day. It is easily distinguished from the other two species by its leaves and by its peculiar root system. Both single and double forms are available in red, white and pink, and it usually comes into bloom about a week after the fern-leaf peony, lasting till the earliest varifol

the Chinese peony begin to open.

Most of the very large number of named varieties of peony grown today belong to the species commonly called Chinese peony, (*Paeonia albiflora*) of which the American Peony Society now recognizes four distinct types—single, Japanese, semi-double and double. Three of these terms are self-explanatory. The other may not be quite clear. Japanese peonies do not necessarily come from Japan, nor did the type originate there. This type was so named because the people of Japan particularly admire that form of the Chinese peony and grow it extensively. It differs from the single peony in having the stamens changed into staminodes—sterile stamens, or nearly so; greatly enlarged, thick and narrow, of various colours, and bearing very little pollen, or none at all. Sometimes they are petaloid. Early, midseason and late varieties of all four types of the Chinese peony can be obtained in colours that range from pure white through many shades of pink to very dark red, and there are a few that are very nearly yellow. The earliest varieties of this species will usually come into bloom in the Peace River District during the fourth week of June, when the last flowers of the *officinalis* varieties are fading, and the latest during the second week of July, with the great majority of them blooming between those dates, but there is no fixed blooming date. June 21, 1938, is the earliest date noted in 16 years by the writer on which the earliest *albiflora* variety opened its first flower, while in 1935 the earliest variety of Chinese peony to bloom did not open its first flower till July 7.

SOIL

Peonies prefer a slightly alkaline condition but will grow in any type of soil that is well provided with organic matter, and are at their best in a cool, clayey loam. When planted on light soils they make a very rapid growth, but bear inferior blooms, of light substance, that fade quickly when cut, and some authorities advise addition of clay to such soils before planting peonies. In a heavy clay soil they develop more slowly but will eventually produce magnificent flowers if given proper care.

LOCATION

Selection of a suitable location for the peony bed at the outset may save much disappointment later on, and certain sites frequently used ought to be particularly avoided. They are heavy feeders and will not tolerate grass and tree roots among their own. If planted on a lawn, a clear space of at least 18 inches must always be kept between the plants and the edge of the grass. As tree roots extend beyond the spread of the branches, peonies should not be planted too near trees or tall shrubs. Make allowance for the branch spread of the full-grown tree or shrub and locate the peony bed a little beyond it if the planting is to be permanent. If peonies are planted closer than that to young trees, they will have to be moved as the trees

develop. And they should not be planted near the foundation of a building as the walls absorb moisture and radiate heat and will keep the roots in a dry, unhealthy condition. The location chosen must be well drained because, although they use a good deal of moisture during the growing season, they will not thrive on wet, soggy ground. It should have full, all-day exposure to sunlight if possible, and not less than half a day's sunlight in any case. If too heavily shaded they will bear poor blooms or none at all.

PREPARATION

Most herbaceous perennials must be divided and replanted every three or four years in order to keep them in healthy and vigorous condition, but peonies resent division. As a rule, they do not bloom the first year after division, and may not bloom the second year. In any case, the first and second year's blooms are usually small and often not true to type or colour. Full-sized blooms of perfect type and colour should not be expected till the third year, and some varieties may take longer. When they once bear perfect blooms of full size, however, they will continue to do so indefinitely, and if no accident should interfere, they will usually outlive the planter, so that, except when grown specially for propagation, they need never be divided at all and, in any event they should be allowed to remain undisturbed for 7 or 8 years. For this reason a plantation of peonies should be regarded as a permanent investment and it is well worthwhile to take some extra pains in giving the ground thorough preparation. They are deep-rooted and will go down as far as the grower may care to dig, but if only a shallow preparation is given, the roots will spread out laterally on reaching hard, unbroken subsoil, and, having only a limited feeding range, will suffer much more from unfavorable weather conditions than those planted in properly prepared ground. Too shallow preparation is a very frequent cause of failure to bloom.

PROPAGATION

As seed is slow in germinating, and peonies do not come true from seed, they are usually propagated by root division, for which purpose two or three-year-old plants may be used.

Dig up the whole plant, remove the stems, shake off the loose earth and leave the roots exposed for two hours or more so as to wilt them. They are very brittle when freshly dug and will break badly if division is attempted as soon as they are taken up. After wilting, wash away the remaining earth and examine carefully to find where it may be most easily divided. Use a strong, sharp knife and make divisions with about five eyes each.

TIME OF PLANTING

Divisions should always be made in the Fall as soon as growth is completed. Further south this usually occurs early in September, but up here plants are not ready for division, as a rule, till the end of that month.

Planting should preferably be done in the Fall, from the time roots are available until the ground freezes. Good results will be obtained from early Spring planting, however, provided imported plants do not grow in transit as, in that case, the buds are likely to be broken off in handling; or, if they are some weeks in reaching their destination, they may develop in the package long, weak shoots that will probably heat and rot.

SPACING AND PLANTING

Plants should be spaced not less than three feet apart, and four feet would be better as free circulation of air between the plants is important. Too close planting will produce conditions favorable to the development of blight. If given the full spacing, annuals may be planted between the peonies the first year, but later on the peonies will require the whole space. Care should be taken when planting to set the crown—the point where stems and roots unite—at the proper depth, i.e., two inches beneath the surface in heavy soils, or three inches in sandy soils. If planted too deep they will not bloom, and if the crown is exposed the plant will die.

INSECT PESTS

Up to the present, ants are the only insects that have been observed here on peonies. They are attracted by the sugary exudate given off by the developing bud and do no mechanical injury to the plant, but they may carry from plant to plant spores of Botrytis, a fungus that causes peony blight.

DISEASES

Blight, caused by various fungi—notably by Botrytis—is the only serious disease that is frequently met with here. Wet weather, poor drainage and too close spacing—conditions which the grower can easily correct—are favorable to the development of the causal organisms. Frequent cultivation throughout the growing season will aid greatly in its control. Diseased parts should be removed and burned as soon as they are observed and the plants sprayed with a fungicide. It is also advisable to remove the earth from about the crowns of diseased plants and replace it with clean soil. As spores of the fungi go through the Winter on the stems and leaves, it is a good preventive practice to cut the stems off as low as possible without injuring the buds as soon as the plants cease growing in the Fall, and burn them.

CAUSES OF FAILURE TO BLOOM

"Why don't my peonies bloom?" is a question so frequently asked that it may be well to summarize the chief causes here though they have been already indicated. They are:

1. Recent transplanting, especially of small divisions
2. Too deep planting
3. An unsuitable location, i.e., one in which there may be (a)

excessive shade; (b) deficiency in soil moisture due to the presence of tree or grass roots, buildings; (c) poor drainage

4. Poor preparation resulting in lack of moisture, restricted root growth, and small seeding area

5. Coddling—mainly by over-fertilizing

6. Diseased roots

7. Blight

8. Untimely Spring frosts

CUTTING FOR USE INDOORS

Blooms for indoor use should always be cut early in the morning and as the flowers of most varieties—especially yellow ones—bleach when allowed to open on the stem, it should be done before they open fully. If cut when the first outer petals begin to lift and while the bud is still hard, it will open indoors in about three days, and cutting is best done at that stage, or at any time between that and when the bud is half-open. The stems should not be too short. Sixteen inches would be about right, provided not more than one-third of the blooms of any single plant are cut in that manner as it may mean removal of too many leaves. It may be observed that commercial cut flowers (peonies) are taken with much longer than sixteen-inch stems. If even a single large flower like a peony is cut with a very short stem, it would look unnaturally rigid when placed in a vase, and if two or more very short-stemmed blooms are placed in the same container, in order to get the stems into water, the flowers must be pressed together so that the outline of individual blooms is destroyed and the beauty of form lost.

EXHIBITION BLOOMS

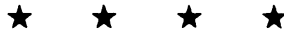
For exhibition, disbudding is essential. Select one or two promising stems of each variety that is intended to be shown. Remove the lateral buds as soon as they develop, leaving only the large terminal bud and, in order to prevent sunburn, cover it when about the size of a marble with a half-pound paper bag on which the name of the variety is clearly written in indelible ink. A one-inch rubber band will keep the cover securely in place. After heavy rain the bag should be raised if it touches the bud as discoloration may take place if they are allowed to remain in contact. Cut with sixteen-inch stems, or longer—all the same length—when the upper third of the bud is soft to the touch. Remove all but two or three leaves and place in water in a cool dark place for about six hours. Then remove the covers and bring them into the light and they are ready for the show.

If they are to be kept for any length of time, the leaves and stems should be carefully dried with a cloth on removal from the water and the blooms placed in cold storage at a temperature of 35° to 40°, from which they should be taken 24 to 36 hours before they are required, depending upon the length of time they have been in storage. Cut an inch from the ends of the stems on taking them from cold storage,

and place them in cold water in a cool place. Loosen, but do not remove the covers till they are required for use.

FRAGRANCE

Fragrance in peonies is largely a matter of opinion. Red varieties, as a rule, have very little fragrance—often none at all—and white varieties are generally more fragrant than pink ones. Japanese and single peonies—and some semi-doubles—usually have a peculiar fragrance, attributed to pollen which many people dislike, and it is usually described in the manual as "unpleasant" or "disagreeable" but I do not find it so myself.



(Mr. Nicholas Friend of Sunnyside, Washington sends the following: "Fungus attacks Cork Oaks." This is the same Phytophthora Blight in peonies, which starts after blooming, according to the County Agent working with Mr. Friend, in the identification of this blight, on some of his peonies.)

FUNGUS ATTACKS CORK OAKS

Washington Post

Cork oaks, whose bark is the source of commercial cork, are dying in the heart of their range: Portugal, Spain, Italy, Morocco and Tunisia. According to a report in the current *Nature*, they are the latest species to fall to one of the world's worst plant diseases—a soil-dwelling fungus called *Phytophthora cinnamomi* that kills roots. It is thought to have spread from New Guinea many years ago, largely through human activities, and is now attacking hundreds of species on almost every continent.

It is the main fungus that wiped out the chestnuts of the eastern United States early in this century and that has been killing European chestnuts since the 1940s. In California, it is attacking walnuts, avocados, almonds and apricots. In Maryland, it infects peaches. In Australia, it is felling eucalyptus forests. In central and eastern Europe, it is extirpating some oak species.

"It is definitely one of the most serious plant pathogens and it is spreading," said John S. M. Mircetich, a plant pathologist at the Agriculture Department's Agricultural Research Service in David, Calif.

C. M. Brasier of the Alice Holt Lodge Forest Research Station in Britain, author of the *Nature* report, said he found the fungus in the roots of dying cork oaks in Portugal and Spain.

Because the fungus is now so widespread, there is little hope of stopping it with fungicides. Instead, scientists are trying to breed resistant varieties. The effort may become more urgent. Brasier speculated that because the fungus is more active in warm soils, global warming could be speeding its spread.





Linwood Tree Peonies

1912 York Road, Pavilion, NY

You are cordially invited to a benefit lecture by Nassos. Daphnis, "The Development of Tree Peony Hybrids," on Sunday, May 30, 1993, at 3:00 p.m.

Nassos Daphnis, artist and hybridizer, has worked with tree peonies since his early collaboration with William Gratwick in the 1930s.

His presentation will include his personal story with plants at the Gratwick nursery; the lifecycle of the tree peony; the first-, second-, and third-generation hybrids; and his spectacular photograph of tree peony flowers.

We are delighted to be able to share this event with you. If you would like to attend the lecture (seating is limited), please return the form below by May 10. We will be asking for a suggested contribution of \$10 at the door to help support the peony gardens.

If you are interested in just enjoying the flowers, do come and visit the gardens on May 29 or 31, from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. Parking and information will be available at the Big House.

I would like to attend the Daphnis lecture and tour of the gardens.

Name

Address

Phone

Please return by May 10 to Lee Gratwick, 1912 York Road, Pavilion, NY 14525

NOTES ON THE HISTORY, FABLES, AND HORTICULTURE OF PAEONIA

by Beverly Phillips, South Australia

(The information and research of this article was compiled by one of the guides, Beverly Phillips, in the Mt. Lofty Botanic Gardens, South Australia, to be used by fellow guides. It was submitted for publication by Neville Harrop; Beverly Phillips is also a member of the American Peony Society.)

Most authorities agree that there are 33 species in the genus *Paeonia*. They are mostly herbs, with a few being branched subshrubs. They are found only in the northern hemisphere, from western Europe, Morocco and Algiers through Europe; to Asia Minor and the Caucasus, and from Siberia and northern India through central Asia to western China and Japan. There are two outlying species in N.W. America.

Until about 20 years ago, the *Paeonia* were included in the family Ranunculaceae. You will often find them still included in this family in non-specialist literature. However, the taxonomists have now decided that the peonies are sufficiently different to have a family to themselves, the Paeoniaceae. This is accepted in peony circles including the American Peony Society which is probably the most influential.

Derivation of the name

Paeonia was the name given by the ancient Greeks to the plant *P. officinalis*. The derivation involves one of the typically convoluted relationships of various gods. Zeus and Leto were the parents of Apollo who in turn was the father of Aesculapius. Paeon, a pupil of Aesculapius, was given the peony on Mt. Olympus by Leto. He used it to cure Pluto of wounds he received from Hercules in the Trojan Wars. This ignited jealousy in the breast of Aesculapius who then had Paeon killed. Pluto, although unable to save him, in his gratitude changed him into a flower, a peony.

This is the story related by Homer. It is interesting to note that after the time of Homer, the name and the office of healer were transferred from Paeon to Apollo. Subsequently a paeon was a choral song to Apollo or Artemis (his twin sister) in thanksgiving for deliverance from evil. Later it was addressed to other gods on similar occasions and later still in the same way to mortals. It has now come to mean a loud and joyous song.

Introduction to Horticulture

The history of the peony follows two separate branches, i.e. in Western and Eastern civilizations.

Western civilization

P. officinalis. This was one of the plants described in detail by Theophrastus in his *Enquiry into Plants* written about 300 B.C. This

and other eastern Mediterranean species were held in awe as the seeds of some species were luminescent.

The European peonies were valued for their medicinal use long before their flowers were considered beautiful for themselves. Their herbal value is mentioned often, from Theophrastus to Hippocrates and Galen. The latter were convinced of the peony's healing virtues and it was used for epilepsy, eclampsia, insanity and as a curative for blisters, coughs and catarrh. The roots actually do contain an alkaloid with a sedative effect. An infusion of the seeds acts as an emetic and purgative. As with related members of the Ranunculaceae, the various parts of the peony are poisonous to some degree. Culpeper and Parkinson both highly recommended peony root for epilepsy but as the sufferers were required to hang dried roots around their necks, they escaped the unpleasant side-effects which must have arisen from actual ingestion. There are references in early English writings, notably Alexander Neckham, Abbot of Cirencester, who wrote *De naturis rerum* (1190), and Langland in *Piers Plowman* (1380), to the use of peony seed for flavoring meat. Presumably any emetic or purgative effect was then blamed on the quality of the meat rather than the presence of the peony seeds.

Parkinson in his *Paradisi in Sole* says that peonies are cherished for their goodly flowers as well as their physical virtues. It was about this era also that other flowers were appreciated for themselves and not just their herbal value.

The first plants of the double form of *P. officinalis* reached England sometime before the beginning of the sixteenth century. The red, white and pink forms of this are still being grown although they have been superseded by later hybrids. *P. lactiflora* was introduced from Siberia towards the end of the eighteenth century (it was also known as *P. albiflora* "The Bride"). It was widely used by nineteenth century hybridists to impart its perfume and creamy color to its offspring.

For more than 2,000 years there has been a peasant superstition that peony roots should only be gathered in the dark of night. It is most interesting that Theophrastus (in 300 BC) in discussing unfounded superstitions, mentions this one. It was believed that if one was observed gathering peony roots by a woodpecker, one would lose one's sight. Pliny translated the work of Theophrastus into Latin in the first century AD, repeating this particular passage correctly. However, when Pliny was translated into English 1,400 years later, his Elizabethan translator rendered it as a fact rather than an unfounded superstition, with the added embellishment that the woodpecker would peck out the eyes. It is surprising that Theophrastus did not launch an Olympian thunderbolt at this translator.

Beliefs such as these were thought to be spread by the gatherers to guard their sources. Strange tales have arisen about other plants

which were of commercial value at the time, notably the mandrake root.

Eastern civilization

P. lactiflora has been cultivated in China since the fifth century BC, but it is *P. suffruticosa*, the tree peony (Moutan) which caught the heart and soul over the centuries. Its blooms have been depicted in paintings and embroidery, poems have been written about it, and young men became priests to guard and pray for the tree peonies growing in the Royal Gardens.

Tree peonies were described over 1,500 years ago and it is known that the first varieties date back at least to the Tang dynasty in 6400 AD. It was at this time that they became highly fashionable and their prices soared. A Chinese poem of the time mentions that 100 pieces of damask were given for the most beautiful flowers and five pieces of silk for commoner types. A poor man passing by said "a bunch of dark red flowers would pay the taxes on 10 poor people's houses." When Emperor Yung Lo of the Ming dynasty moved the court to Peking, he ordered an annual pilgrimage to observe the flowers, a custom followed faithfully up to the nineteenth century. The Chinese were thought to have developed more than 300 varieties.

Tree peonies were also grown and prized in Japan since the eighth century AD. The Japanese concentrated on breeding stems thicker to support the enormous blooms and also on semi-double rather than double flowers. The reputation of these plants reached Europe before the actual plants. Sir Joseph Banks tried to import some from Canton but all the plants died on the voyage. Dr. Duncan of the East India Company brought a live plant to Kew in 1789 but it soon died. In 1794, the ship *Triton* reached London with seven tree peonies—one for the King, two for Sir Joseph Banks, and four for another gentleman. Two died but the other five survived. Ten years later, William Kerr sent another consignment which arrived safely from Canton. Live plants had also reached France and in 1814 peony mania there put the price up to 100 louis d' or (2,000 francs) a plant. In 1830, Von Siebold brought a vast collection of tree peonies from Japan. This collection was said to have been gathered from the old Imperial Gardens in Tokyo and Kyoto.

In 1843, the Royal Horticultural Society sent Robert Fortune to China to procure new peonies. He found that each district had its own varieties and he collected 30 to 40 different varieties.

Tree peonies were introduced into the U.S.A. about the turn of the century, and the American Peony Society was formed shortly afterwards. It is probably the greatest force in the peony world today. Their present direction seems to be a concentration on *P. suffruticosa* x *P. lutea* hybrids. They are also experimenting with hybrids between tree peonies and the herbaceous *P. lactiflora*. These are known as ITOH hybrids. They are usually herbaceous and come

back to a characteristic size each year. Some have a markedly lateral form.

Searches have been made for quite a long time for wild forms of *P. suffruticosa*. In 1910 W. Purdom found a possible candidate with a dark red single flower on a mountain slope in south Kansu. In 1914 the intrepid Reginald Farrer found another candidate near a village on the Black River. This plant had a large single creamy white flower with maroon blotches at the base of the petal. He was not there long enough to obtain seed. In 1926, Dr. Joseph Rock, an American botanist was staying at a lamasery at Choni in Kansu Province. It was here in the courtyard that he found growing a plant which corresponded to Farrer's description. This plant was said by the monks to be quite old and to have come from Kansu but they did not know exactly where. Fortunately, Dr. Rock was able to send seed of this plant to the Arnold Arboretum as in 1928 the lamasery was destroyed and the monks killed by Muslims. The seedlings raised were all alike and agreed with Farrer's description. They are known as *P. suffruticosa* "Rock's Variety." I could not find any reference in the literature to seed being germinated from the single red type found by Purdom.

These various candidates could all possibly be garden escapees so it is not possible to say that any are the true wild form of *P. suffruticosa*. Perhaps further searches in China may shed new light or perhaps the wild type may have disappeared because peonies have been prized and sought after for so long.

Horticultural Aspects

Peonies have attractive foliage with deeply cut leaves ranging from light to dark green, depending on the species. Some also have reddish stems. The leaves of some have appealing autumn colors. The main interest, however, lies in the flowers. The species have flowers in white, yellow and shades of pink through magenta to maroon, which are generally fairly large (one to six inches across). The herbaceous hybrids have flowers in the same color range, 4 to 8 inches across, and are sometimes perfumed. They may be single, semi-double or double.

The tree peonies have the most stunning flower of any shrub. They can be from 6 to 12 inches across, single, semi-double or double, and have a lovely crinkled silk texture somewhat like poppies. They are all late Winter-Spring flowering in Australia.

The tree peonies are quite hardy plants belying the apparent tenderness of the blooms. They thrive in the continental climate areas of the U.S.A. They can be difficult in the U.K. where the promise of Spring may start them into growth only to be hit hard by late frosts. It is also possible that they need some hot Summer weather to ripen the wood.

It is obvious from this that the tree peony can cope with a wide

range of temperatures. It is not seen more often because it is difficult to propagate and, hence, expensive. It is grown from divisions or grafting, usually onto herbaceous peony roots. It can also be layered but may take two or more years to root properly. Unfortunately, it does not take from cuttings.

Tree peonies can cost from about \$40 upwards which sometimes surprises people. However, grafted Japanese maples are often double that and the tree peonies are the more adaptable plant, besides being very long-lived.

Australia's only commercial producer of tree peonies is Mr. Neville Harrop of Hobart. He has about 100 plants at any one time from which he propagates by division or grafting onto herbaceous peony roots. Nine of the plants in Mr. Henderson's collection came from Mr. Harrop. At least two other plants were obtained from Oliver's Hill Nursery near Frankston in Victoria—they were probably seedlings. The remainder of the plants probably came from Smirnows in the U.S.A., and there is some doubt about the accuracy of the naming of these Japanese tree peonies.

The herbaceous hybrid peonies are also fairly amenable plants but while they tolerate severe cold, they do not manage as well as their tree cousins in heat. They will grow but not flower well. The peony species come from a wide range of areas and most are tolerant of a fairly wide range of conditions. Those at Mt. Lofty were grown from seed imported from the U.K. and several European countries, e.g. Austria, Switzerland and Germany.

Note re: spelling of peony—the mongrel English spelling 'paeony' mixing the centuries' old traditional English peony and the Latin *Paeonia* was a nineteenth century introduction with nothing to recommend it, and found no acceptance in America.

I have used the spelling "peony" throughout. In fact, it is quite common in Australia for herbaceous peony roots to be offered as "paeony roses" in gardening magazines. This probably a heritage from our Irish ancestors as the term paeony rose is apparently still in use in Ireland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must thank Tina Miljanovic at Mt. Lofty and Mr. Neville Harrop in Hobart for a lot of help in supplying useful information.



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IN THE CHINESE PEONY PARADISE —SOME EXCITING SHAPES AND COLORS

David M. Furman, Cricket Hill Garden, Thomaston, Connecticut

At Cricket Hill Garden, the more we observe and learn about the Chinese form of tree peonies (*P. suffruticosa*), the more fascinated we become.

In the American Peony Society's book, *The American Tree Peony*, it is hard to find any flowers that are not single, or some form of semi-double. Among Chinese tree peonies, we are able to identify at least six and perhaps several more distinctive flower shapes. In the book, *The Peony in Luoyang*, the Chinese identify flower shapes as: sunflower, lotus, imperial crown, silk ball, cabbage rose, and skyscraper. We think Americans are better acquainted with the flower shapes called: single, light semi-double, full semi-double, ball-shaped double, cabbage rose double, bomb, and thousand petal shape.

This last variety is a shape that we have never seen among either American hybrid tree peonies or the Japanese tree peony varieties. The flower may be described as a rounded cluster of central petals and petaloids rising above a flattened ring of outer petals. The flower shape it slightly resembles is a herbaceous bomb.

We have also noted another unusual shape—a flower with the petals forming an outer ring and the petaloids rising large and twisted from the center of the flower. It is most novel and does not appear on all flowers of the plant. In some ways it looks similar to the herbaceous form "flower in a flower."

Looking at books with pictures of Chinese tree peonies, it is easy to understand the commonly held view that the Chinese gardener has a strong preference for the double forms of the flowers. In his descriptions in the March, 1993 *American Peony Society Bulletin*, Mr. R. Hashida made the same point about the differences between Japanese and Chinese tree peony forms. The great majority of flowers photographed in the book, *The Peony in Luoyang*, are some form of double flowers. Many appear to have hundreds of petals. Some of these flowers will hang down when in full bloom. Other flowers are sidefacing. Downfacing, sidefacing, or hidden among leaves, these positions are familiar in many of the Saunders and Daphnis hybrids.

The colors and shades of the Chinese tree peony are as numerous as those found in either American hybrids or Japanese tree peonies. The Chinese have been cultivating these plants for over twelve hundred years and in that time have selected for propagation colors they have found pleasing. The colors are in numerous shades of red, pink, purple, white, yellow, cream, black (actually dark maroon), blue (whitish blue) and green, as well as multi-color. Some flowers change color as the bloom matures; an example is seen in the flowers of "Pea

Green." The flowers open green but fade to white as they mature.

The Chinese have a distinct preference for the reds. They consider this the color of good luck. The best of their reds are reminiscent of fire red or what we would call "Chinese Red."

The multi-color flowers are the most unusual. An example is "Twin Beauty." This plant produces most of its flowers in either red or pink. However, a few flowers are laterally bisected with half the flower in red and half in pink. Another example of the multi-color type is "Charming Beauty Changing Three Times." Here the blooms are light green upon opening, pink-purple in full bloom, and finally white.

In addition to petal colors, several plants have petaloids that show a different color from the rest of the flower. These petaloids are usually green or white and make a striking contrast with the main petal color. "A Ball of Pink Silk Strips" is a good example of this. The shape of this flower is a large ruffled ball double. The outer petals are shades of pink, the inner petals and petaloids are white with the most central petaloids light green.

In some flowers the antlers of the stamens are unusually colored. The peony, "Centerpiece of Fruit," is chartreuse at its center. Seen in combination with the frosted magenta single petals, this flower freezes the eye with its startling contrast.

We feel that the entire group of tree peonies from China has been largely neglected in America. This neglect has deprived us of plants of unique beauty. The pride that the Chinese take in their gardens is evident in many other cultures that have developed unique garden styles—the Italian, the French, English, Persian and Japanese, for instance. Such pride is the universal characteristic that all human beings bring to their gardening arts.

★ ★ ★ ★

**CONVENTION OF
THE AMERICAN PEONY SOCIETY
THE 90TH ANNUAL MEETING
AND THE 88TH
NATIONAL EXHIBITION
KINGWOOD CENTER—MANSFIELD, OHIO
June 4 - 5 and 6th, 1993**

SPECIES AND GARDEN HYBRIDS

Don Hollingsworth, Kansas City, Missouri

A request was received for the lobata or peregrina peony, saying that this plant was wanted in order to grow some of the species which are involved in the parentage of garden hybrids. Part of the challenge is how to locate plants of which you can be confident are like those used by past breeders, those responsible for most of the hybrids currently available in the trade.

There is considerable conflicting usage of the name "lobata" in the literature of botany and of garden peonies. Along with "peregrina" the name was used for different kinds at both the scientific and gardener/breeder levels and then changed for purposes of botany to *Paeonia peregrina*. The plants known in gardens as lobata were attributed to peregrina by the most recent monographer of the genus (F. C. Stern, *A Study of the Genus Paeonia*, The Royal Horticultural Society, London, 1946). The confusion arose initially due to the independent finds of various botanists as they worked to locate and describe the wild peonies, often using the same name for different kinds, then apparently was compounded during handling of herbarium specimens. Stern is generally believed to have done a credible job of sorting this out from the standpoint of the botanical nomenclature. However, the problems had already become somewhat entrenched in publication and in the plant trade.

For our purposes it is important we keep in mind that species names cover groups of like plants as they exist in nature, while in the domestic plant trade the basic unit is often a single plant or the plants of a single clone, which has been asexually propagated, as is the situation with peonies. Also, although the members of a species population will be generally similar to each other, an individual plant which is retained under domestic propagation may or may not be typical of the wild population to which it traces.

It is characteristic that growers propagate and distribute a given plant under the name by which it was received. This continues to the present day. Not long ago I obtained a species peony under the label "peregrina," which when it grew the following year was quite a different plant than what I expect of typical peregrina. When I discussed my observations with the supplier, I learned that his stock came from a reputable grower who got it from another reputable grower all of whom I know to be persons of integrity. They had simply taken care to preserve the identity of the plant as it was originally received, just as they do with the other peonies they grow.

The problem in verifying the identity of the species plants we grow is that the botanical reference base is not readily available to most growers. However, with use of some copied references and observations taken over three seasons, I tentatively conclude the

"false" peregrina plant is of the species *Paeonia humilis*, a species which was at least once described by a botanist under the name peregrina. (A friend who has a piece of it from me says it is *P. broteri*, upon first year observation.) While I am confident this is not the *P. peregrina* of Stern, it will take perhaps more than the resources available to me to be sure what it is. Without a good, verified color illustration of plant and flower of the species, or, comparison to authoritatively identified index plants, the identity could remain tentative.

Stern's article on the peregrina peonies emphasizes the distinguishing features of foliage and flower. In my observation the plant and flower are noteworthy. The petals are a good orangey red color, shiny, and strongly cupped, forming a very showy flower. The flower opens and closes like a tulip as the temperature rises and falls, closing at around 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Stern says it is the finest species for the garden. The leaf and stem are smooth, leaves much divided into rather narrow leaflets (as are many of the species), but the leaflets distinctively toothed or notched at their ends. This latter character and temperature responsiveness of the flowers are also seen in Saunders Lobata of Perry Hybrids, the group which includes **Cytharea, Carina, Lovely Rose, Bravura, Cardinal's Robe, Ludovica, Ellen Cowley, Elizabeth Foster**, and perhaps 30 other named varieties, which as a group also exhibit very "sharp" colors.

I grow plants of two sources both of which seem clearly the same as Stern's peregrina. One I had from Ben Gilbertson in 1970, my catalog number (accession number) 57. The other I had from Allen Harper in 1971, my number 120. The latter came to me under the label '**Otto Froebel**,' which name attracted my interest because Saunders had introduced a race of hybrids (e.g., **Victoria Lincoln**) made by crossing a plant of this name with lacti garden varieties.

When my two plants came to flowering they were obviously identical botanically. Although I at first thought #57 the stronger grower, later, when they both had prospered, they seem entirely identical—could easily be the same clone, leading to question whether my #120 is **Otto Froebel**.

Whether these are the same as what Saunders had as **Otto Froebel** there is no way to know. I do suspect that my plants are botanically the same as his 'Lobata of Perry' (although not the same clone). However, there is nothing in my collection of Saunders literature, and I have a great deal of such, which indicates he thought the "lobata" he had from Amos Perry was the same as the **Otto Froebel** which he had used earlier.

Among other observations, I also had a plant from Gilbertson under the name "lobata" which was not the same as #57. It was a shorter plant, perhaps a weaker grower under my conditions, had rounded leaflet ends as in plants of *Paeonia officinalis*, and a non-

descript flower of a rosy salmon petal color. This plant disappeared early on, before I had studied much literature on species or on the question of distinguishing between species and unfamiliar hybrids.

Another plant came as "lobata" from Miss Silvia Saunders, received in 1969, also of short stature, but with a beautiful flower. It too had rounded leaflet ends, in contrast to the notch-ended *P. peregrina* leaflets. The flower color was similar, being only a little redder, petals shorter, but also cupped. I do not remember having any seedlings of this plant, and don't recall having used it, especially in my crosses. (For this line of breeding I have preferred to use members of the similarly fertile Saunders Little Reds Hybrids group, which have one or another of the double flowered forms of *officinalis* as one parent and the 'Lobata of Perry' as the other.) If I did use the lobata from Miss Saunders in crossing, the absence of any seedlings would be consistent with a conclusion that it is an infertile hybrid.

Whenever we obtain plants from seeds produced in a mixed planting by open pollination, which is most often the case, they usually come labeled with the seed parent name. However, the only way to be sure of the pollen parent identity is if the person who produced the seeds deliberately sought to control the pollination and says so. Thus, "species" plants grown from seeds collected in gardens should be observed for evidence whether they are true as the plants grow to maturity. This, of course, also applies for any plants received from others when the origin cannot be obtained.

Professor Saunders described another lobata that was significant in his breeding program and compared its breeding results with those of 'Lobata of Perry.' This was Saunders #5267. Among its introduced hybrid progeny are **Montezuma** and **Heritage**. While #5267 gave fine garden hybrids among its seedlings, Saunders noted that the seed yield was low, more like that of *officinalis* varieties in crosses on lacti peonies, and that the progeny gave only red flowers. In contrast 'Lobata of Perry' was almost as fertile in crosses on lacti varieties as another lacti (he raised more than 1600 of these hybrids) and the progeny flower colors range from deep red through light pinks. Also, we now know that, with patience, some of the latter have enough fertility to be used for breeding, whereas the hybrids made using #5267 seem to be entirely sterile.

For me the status of the short lobatas having round-tipped leaflets remains unresolved. As the opportunity arises, I obtain plants for observation. Lately I received plants of a lobata **Sunshine** from Holland. The few hybrid pollinations so far tried have not resulted in seeds, which suggests low fertility and possible hybrid origin.

In 1992, I was able to obtain several plants under species variety designations, including several of the garden varieties of *Paeonia officinalis* **Otto Froebel**, and a plant identified as *P. lobata*. I am of the impression that the stock from which the plants were shipped to

me had been obtained in Europe. Since these kinds are more widely known there, I am hoping they will be true to name and enable some helpful observations.

The Stern monograph is a valuable reference for anyone trying to verify the status of so-called species plants. It provides the name determined according to standard botanical rules, as applied under the author's construction of the species relationships. Stern explains well what he has done and gives a thorough record of his data sources, including a substantial statement on the historical confusion concerning peregrina and lobata names. One does not have to agree with all of his conclusions to benefit by the work. This book is available in many North American science and technology libraries and those of botanical gardens. Moreover, it is not copyrighted and can be photocopied without special permission. It is a rare book in the trade, now selling at a large premium, so it will normally be restricted to use at the institution where a copy is available.

The Peonies, John C. Wister, ed., The American Horticultural Society, 1962, available from the American Peony Society, contains a summary of Stern's species articles. The Society's newer book, *The American Hybrid Peony*, offers discussion of the species as garden subjects and colored illustrations of plants in flower for some of the species.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PEONIES IN AMERICA

R. F. Koby, Superior, Wisconsin — written 1949

Peonies in the American Garden is positively established at the opening of the 19th century. They may have been grown by Americans prior to that date but there seems to be no record of it that can be found. Shortly after 1800, the sciences of Agriculture and Horticulture were divided into separate groups—horticulture taking over the field of tree and flowering plant life. With this change, literature arose dealing with the art of horticulture which helped to distinguish it from agriculture, and with this literature we find the peony mentioned.

Bernard McMahan in his *American Gardener's Chronical*, published in 1806, includes five kinds of peonies grown in the Middle and Eastern States. They are as follows: *P. Officinalis*, common peony; *albiflora*, white flowered peony; *lacinati*, jagged, leaved peony; *hybrida*, mule peony; and *tenuifolia*, slender leaved peony. Presumably all these existed in America when the book was printed. Other critics suggest that this list was constructed from English sources.

John Bartram and Son included in their catalogue of 1807, *Foreign Plants Collected from Various Parts of the Globe, and cultivated at their Botanic Garden at Kingsessing, near Philadelphia*. Five years after John Bartram's death, the catalogue carries six peonies in addition to tree peonies. The listing and their prices are as follows:

<i>Paeonia officinalis</i> , Crimson officinal peony.....	\$.25
<i>Paeonia albicans</i> , Double white.....	.25
<i>Paeonia rosea</i> , Rose coloured.....	.25
<i>Paeonia rubra</i> , Double Red.....	.25
<i>Paeonia carnescens</i> , Flesh coloured.....	1.00
<i>Paeonia albiflora simplex</i> , Single white.....	1.00

Green's Treatise on Ornamental Flowers, published in Boston in 1828, includes peonies as "Leading Plants" of that day. The same year Thomas Hogg exhibited *P. Officinalis* in New York Horticultural Society.

Walter W. Cunningham writes in *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 5, 1947 of Joseph Banks, an explorer who smuggled peonies out of China and into Europe prior 1805. This seems to supersede any other information on the peony in this country.

Without a doubt, some of this same stock reached America as well as England and France and became parent stock later for American breeders. One variety, *Fragrance*, which was very fragrant and which could be cut in tight bud and opened perfectly four weeks later, still possesses its great fragrance.

Cunningham's story of W. Ormiston Roy of Montreal, Canada, who attempted in 1926 to have Canada adopt the Peony as its national flower, because it could be grown any place in the Dominion, is an incident we must not lose track of as we write this history of the Peony in America. Five minutes of your time spent in reading this article of Cunningham's will again retell the story of how the love for the peony becomes most fascinating to the ardent peony lover.

William Prince of Flushing, Long Island seems to be the motivating spirit for early peony planting in this country. In 1829, in his annual catalogue of trees and plants, says, "No class of flowers has recently attracted more attention in Europe than peonies . . . Most of the varieties are extremely splendid and others possess striking peculiarities. Anticipating that a similar taste would be evidenced in this country, the proprietor has by great exertion, obtained every variety possible from Europe and also a number from China." He lists forty kinds with a great diversity of shades and colours. Prices range from fifty cents to twenty dollars, but most of the plants were quoted under two dollars. Other works appeared from time to time. Dr. A. B. Strong was the first to publish a Botanical work using coloured cuts, hand coloured. No two of the same species were coloured alike.

By 1850, new species of the unique and fragrant types were coming on the market and created a demand for the new Chinese Peony.

From here on, the next century of progress of the peony centers around personalities. Individuals, not necessarily professional nursery men, contributed greatly to the advance of the peony, and its present high esteem is the result of very arduous and painstaking work by American, European and Asiatic growers. Until the opening

of the twentieth century, the French Breeders probably lead the procession of fine peonies. However, the last half century the American growers have taken their place in the life of the peony, and today the American Breeders lead the world in their output of rare and fine peonies. Briefly we shall try to trace the work of the pioneer and the modern breeder who hold a place in the spotlight of peonydom.

H. A. Terry of Crescent, Iowa, seems to be the first pioneer in America to attempt growing peonies from seed. In 1848, he secured from William Prince thirty varieties of which many produced seed.

John Richardson, Dorchester, Massachusetts, brought out many fine peonies, beginning in 1857. One of his creations, **WALTER FAXON**, is a great pink peony.

Mrs. Sarah Pleas of Indiana, in 1880, grew seedlings, named and introduced them, and sold them to Nurserymen. One of hers to be remembered is **JUBILEE**, 1908.

T. C. Thurlow started planting in 1875. He lived at West Newbury, Massachusetts.

George Hollis, South Weymouth, Massachusetts, originated about one hundred beginning in 1900.

E. J. Shaylor of Ashtabula, Ohio, purchased land in Auburndale, Massachusetts in 1898, and in the twenty-eight years following produced many outstanding varieties.

Prof. A. P. Saunders of Clinton, New York, has had a far-reaching effect in all phases of the peony: breeding species, the American tree peony, and hybrid peonies. His contribution to the American Peony Society, in his writing and knowledge, has given other breeders a foundation, accepted to be of excellence.

Oliver Brand, 1894, bought land in Faribault, Minnesota, to be known as the Brand Peony Farms. In 1899 his son, Archie M. Brand, graduated in Law from the University of Minnesota, and went into business with his father. He spent his lifetime propagating and breeding peonies. With the affiliation of the young Brand, peony breeding was intensified. Great quantity of seed was planted. The Brands relied upon the bees and insects to give them crosses in their plantings. Segregated plantings of two or three select species would be made a great distance from other stock. Using an illustration, in a three-row planting, the two outside rows would be of one stock, and the center row would be of stock strong in pollen. This system brought out many fine plants. His creations were outstanding, for now they have been shipped to the four corners of the earth.

Over this period of time, there were other prominent peony growers producing the peony.

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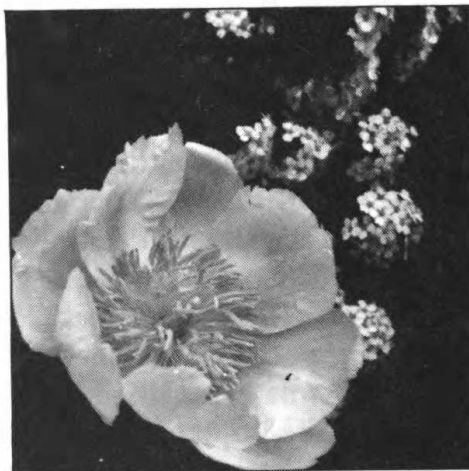


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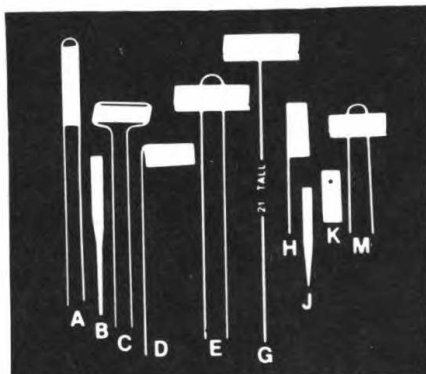
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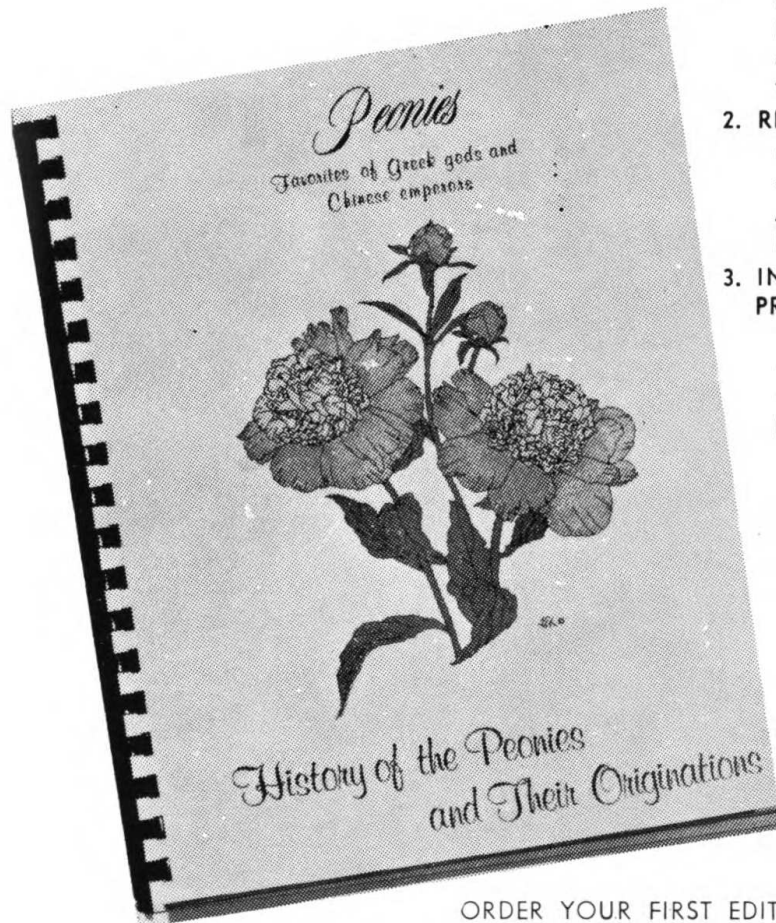
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