

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mgghelp@masshort.org.

Growing Peonies

Peonies are long-lived perennial plants grown for over 3,000 years in China. Initially grown for medicinal reasons, they became the flower of Chinese emperors, appreciated for their ornamental beauty. Ornamental peonies became popular in European and North American gardens in the 1700's. There are three types of peonies grown today: herbaceous, tree, and intersectional.

Herbaceous peonies are the most common. Their lovely blooms come in single, semi-double or double forms in most colors except blue. They grow 2 to 4 feet tall in zones 3-8, preferring neutral soil, rich in organic matter that drains well. Fragrance varies from light to heavy. Peonies grow best in areas that receive full sun, but will grow in partial sun, though they may not bloom as well. Herbaceous peony flowers last about a week. You can enjoy up to six weeks of continuous blooms by planting a mix of early, mid and late blooming varieties. Herbaceous peonies need to be staked early in spring as stalks emerge to provide support for the large blooms.

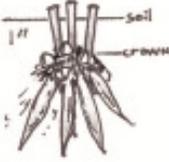
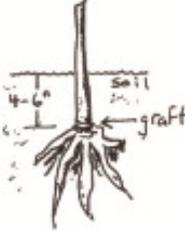
Intersectional (ITOH) peonies were developed in Japan in 1948. They combine the best characteristics of herbaceous and tree peonies. Each plant grows 3 to 4 feet tall, with multiple strong stems that do not need to be staked and produce large, showy flowers. Like the herbaceous peony, intersectional peonies die to the ground each fall.

Tree peonies have woody stems, deciduous leaves and grow up to

5 feet tall and wide. With stem that do not die to the ground in fall, they are more sensitive to cold, growing in zones 4 to 8. They bloom for a two to three week period and prefer partial sun. In full sun the blooms will not last as long.

Peonies have few disease problems. Prevent problems by purchasing strong, healthy plants; planting in areas with good air circulation; avoiding watering the leaves, and practicing good sanitation. The most common problems are fungal diseases, especially botrytis blight and powdery mildew. Botrytis has its onset in early spring in cool, humid conditions. It causes leaves, stems and flower buds to blacken and decay. Treatment involves cutting off and disposing of affected portions. Do not compost. An application of an organic based sulfur or copper fungicide may be necessary, carefully following the directions on the label.

Powdery mildew occurs in late June through September when days are hot and humid and nights are cool. It is not fatal. The leaves appear covered with white powder. Treatment includes spraying with horticultural oil or baking soda spray (1 qt water with a few drops liquid dish soap and 1 tsp baking soda). Prevent overwintering of fungal diseases by disposing of leaves in the fall. Failure to bloom is a problem many peony gardeners experience. Causes include not enough sunlight, planting too deeply, overcrowding, immature plants, too much nitrogen, too little potassium or phosphorus, late spring freezes, or insect problems such as Chafer beetles. Ants, attracted to the wax on herbaceous peony buds, pose no problems and should be ignored.

Herbaceous & ITOH		Tree Peony	
	<p>3 to 8</p> <p>6.0 to 7.0</p> <p>Best in full sun</p> <p>3 feet apart</p> <p>Rich, well draining</p> <p>Evenly moist</p> <p>Crown 1" below soil, or 2" in zones 5 and colder</p> <p>Low nitrogen fertilizer in spring or fall</p> <p>2-3" deep, away from crown</p>	<p>Hardiness Zone</p> <p>pH</p> <p>Light</p> <p>Spacing</p> <p>Soil</p> <p>Water</p> <p>Planting Depth</p> <p>Fertilize</p> <p>Mulch</p>	<p>4 to 8</p> <p>6.5 to 7.5</p> <p>Sun to Part shade</p> <p>4 feet apart</p> <p>Rich, well draining</p> <p>Evenly moist</p> <p>At depth in container or with graft 4 to 6" below soil level</p> <p>Organic fertilizer spring and fall</p> <p>2-3" deep, away from stem</p>
			

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>