

Peonies

What's blooming in your garden? I noticed my peonies blooming last week in time for Memorial Day so I thought an article on them would be timely.

Peonies have been favorite garden plants for hundreds of years. Grown in China and Japan since the seventh century, they have been in the gardens of Europe since the time of the Crusades. In America, peonies have been raised for more than two hundred years. Thomas Jefferson grew peonies in his gardens at Monticello.

Peonies are our favorite perennials for several reasons. They bear some of the most beautiful flowers in the garden. The blooms of many varieties are fragrant. Most peonies are attractive plants throughout the growing season and often have colorful fall foliage.

Other real advantages of peonies are their longevity, cold hardiness and freedom from pests. Peonies grow rather slowly but do well for decades once established. This is in marked contrast to most other garden perennials which need to be dug and divided every several years to ensure continued bloom. Peonies usually do very well in cold climates. Peonies are rarely injured by disease but may occasionally be infected by a few fungi which are common plant pathogens.

Peonies may be grown in any area of the United States with relatively cool winters. They do not do well in the deep South. Roots should be planted in September and October. (Because spring planting is not usually satisfactory, peonies are shipped in the fall.) Peonies need sunlight at least half of the day and do best in a heavy loam.

Early fall--late September through early October--is the best time to plant peonies. This gives them time to become established in the soil before winter. Fully grown peonies may be planted in the spring, but they are more expensive and harder to care for. Remember my column from last September when I talked about Peonies and how they are planted and grown?

There are two basic kinds of peonies. The garden (or herbaceous) peony grows to about 2 to 4 feet and has full bushy stems with many green leaves. Tree peonies are much taller, growing to eye level on woody stems with few leaves and branches. I'll be talking about the herbaceous peony.

There are five different types of herbaceous peony: single, semidouble, double, Japanese and anemone. Single, or Chinese, peonies have one row of broad petals that surround a cluster of yellow, pollen-bearing stamens. The other flower types have central petals in the place of the cluster of stamens, giving the plants a full, pleasing look. They are all extremely fragrant.

There are several situations that can interfere with peony blooms:

- Crowded or old (over 20 years) plants. Peonies must be divided every so often, or the clumps stop blooming.
- Too much shade. Full sun is preferred.
- Roots too deep or too shallow. Eyes must be about 1 inch beneath the surface.
- Lack of fertilization. Buds will form but not open.

Eventually--in about 10 to 15 years--well-cared for peonies will need to be divided. Never divide them before they are at least 3 years old, as this will retard flowering.

Peonies can be left undisturbed for many years. Sometimes, however, it becomes necessary to move established plants. Peonies shaded by large trees or shrubs bloom poorly and should be moved to a sunny site. Large, old plants may become overcrowded and flower poorly. Such plants should be dug, divided, and transplanted to improve performance.

Divide the plants in early fall. October is the best time to divide and move them.

Do you know which state has the Peony as its state flower? On March 13, 1957, the peony (*Paeonia*) was duly adopted by the General Assembly (Indiana Code 1-2-7) as Indiana's official state flower. No specific species or colors were ever designated.

I had somebody tell me that ants help peony buds to open by doing a dance. That is not true. Like any flower, peonies will open up on their own. The ants are there because they are attracted to the sweet nectar on peony buds. Picking peonies early in the morning will not help you avoid getting flowers that are covered with ants. Rain or heavy dew may wash off some of the nectar but there is no way to be sure you won't have ants in the flowers you bring inside. You should remove most of the buds on the stems, leaving only one bud to open and flower. After the single peony opens up, the nectar is gone and so are the ants. If you don't remove buds, after one flower opens, the remaining buds continue to produce their "honey," which attracts ants.

The Peony is the traditional floral symbol of China, the state flower of Indiana, and the 12th wedding anniversary flower. Peonies are known as the flower of riches and honor. With their lush, full, rounded bloom, peonies symbolize romance and prosperity and are regarded as omens of good fortune and a happy marriage.

Summer Agriculture Institute Registration Now Open

The Ramada Inn and Conference Center in Morgantown will be the location for the 2009 Summer Agriculture Institute, on June 18 & 19. The Institute, sponsored by the West Virginia Farm Bureau Foundation, WVU Extension Service, and WVU Davis College of Agriculture, Forestry and Consumer Sciences, gives teachers the opportunity to receive teaching materials and practical, hands-on applications for their classrooms; learn about nutrition, technology, and careers in agriculture; and earn graduate or professional credits.

Teachers who have attended past Institutes are encouraged to reapply, as most content is new for 2009. The registration deadline for the popular seminar is June 1. Many county Farm Bureaus are offering scholarships to cover or help defray the cost. Interested teachers should contact the West Virginia Farm Bureau at 800-398-4630 x. 306 for more information on scholarships.

Graduate and professional credits are available through WVU for an additional fee. Scholarships do not cover the fees for WVU credits.

For a registration form and brochure, visit the West Virginia Farm Bureau website at www.wvfarm.org Follow the links from the above mentioned website or see WVU's site at www.caf.wvu.edu/resm/aee/aic/ for information on credits.

Berkeley County Youth Fair Dates to remember

Poultry Blood Testing - Saturday, July 18, 2009 from 9:00 am to 11:00 am.

62nd Annual Berkeley County Youth Fair dates are August 3 - 8, 2009

Farmers Needed to Participate in the West Virginia Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

The West Virginia Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (WVFMNP) will authorize farmers' to participate in the 2009 FMNP. All farmers participating in WVFMNP must be a bona fide farmer and must sell at an authorized farmers' market or farmstand, or be a local farmer cooperative. In order for a farmer to be legally authorized to participate in the WVFMNP, the following must be met:

- a) Must be a bona fide farmer, meaning an individual authorized to sell eligible produce at participating farmers' markets or farmstands. The term farmer shall mean producer as termed A person or organization that grows or manufactures goods or services for sale.
- b) Must be a bona fide farmstand, meaning the structure should not be movable and is used primarily for the sale of fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables (Vehicles, wagons, carts, trailers, or other wheeled equipment are not acceptable)
- c) Local Farmer Cooperative is individuals who exclusively sell produce from the local farmers and take the vouchers only for those products which are West Virginia grown from the local farmers. A list of those farmers whom you purchase from must be included on the Farmer Application.
- d) Farmer that is selling honey must have their colonies registered with the State and/or list the name of the apiarist they are buying honey from. Product labeling must have been approved through the WV Department of Agriculture and meet all Consumer Labeling Requirements.

- e) Farmer must submit a completed WVMNP Application and Agreement to the WVMNP office. All trainings must be completed by June 26 and paperwork received in Charleston by July 10, 2009. Failure to do so will result in farmer being unable to participate in the 2009 WVMNP Program. All questions on the Application must be completed or the form will be returned.
- f) Each Application will be screened by the WVMNP office.

At least twenty-five (25%) of the produce sold by farmers, must be grown by the farmer, the remainder must be locally grown by a local producer. Locally grown means grown in West Virginia or in the adjacent county to West Virginia's border in a neighboring state. Locally grown is fifty miles (50). If your market organization designates different regulation and you are a member of that organization you must follow their regulations as long as they are in compliance with our WVMNP Rules and Procedures. The program begins July 1, 2009 and goes through October 31, 2009. This program is funded through The United States Department of Agriculture and the State of West Virginia.

Local farmers needing training to participate in the 2009 WVMNP can call Mary Beth Bennett in the Berkeley County Extension Office telephone (304) 264-1936 before Wednesday, June 17th to be trained. Applications for the WVMNP are available through local Extension Offices if the agents have been trained to conduct the program. More information on this program is available on request by contacting the number listed above.

Garden Tips

Plant jack o'lantern pumpkins

Turn compost

Plant an herb garden

Seed snap beans and carrots

Seed summer squash and corn for late crop

Seed cabbage, cauliflower, and broccoli for fall crop

Plant tomatoes

Until next time ...Happy Gardening and Farming!