

Peonies

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.

The garden (or herbaceous) peony which we'll be talking about grows to about 2 to 4 feet and has full bushy stems with many green leaves. Peonies like to have good drainage and prefer a pH of 6.0 to 7.0. The soil should be carefully prepared, as the plants will remain in place for many years.

Mix well-rotted manure, compost, or peat moss into the area for planting. Dig a hole 18 inches across and 18 inches deep for planting each tuber. The holes should be at least 3 feet apart. Break up the soil thoroughly, add 1/2 cup of 10 - 10 - 10 fertilizer to the bottom of the hole, and incorporate 2 - 4 inches of organic matter with the soil in the hole. Fill the hole about half full of amended soil then place the root division with the eyes facing upward.

Plant the peony tuber in the hole with the uppermost eye not more than 2 inches below the soil. Be sure you have purchased tubers that have at least three to five eyes. Tubers with few or no eyes are prone to rot in the soil. Tubers with more than five eyes often produce small flowers.

Put a little soil around the tuber and water thoroughly to settle the soil. Then fill the hole with the remaining soil, tamp, and water again to settle the tuber.

Tubers should be watered frequently after they are set out in the fall and also in the spring and summer of the first growing season to establish the roots. Keep the soil slightly damp, but not wet.

Peonies produce the largest flowers when they are fertilized moderately. The first spring after planting, apply a handful of 6-6-6 fertilizer to the soil around each clump before they emerge. Be careful not to contact the plants directly to avoid burning them.

In subsequent years, apply fertilizer when the flower buds are pea size. A tablespoon of water-soluble 20-20-20 fertilizer in a gallon of water or a solution of "manure-tea" applied once or twice during the growing season is sufficient.

In about two years, the first flowers will begin to appear. The flowers will continue to improve for a number of years if the plants are well cared for.

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.

Divide the plants in early fall. September- October is the best time to divide and move them. Moving established plants is simple. Cut the peony stems near ground level. Then carefully dig around and under each plant. Try to retain as much of the root system as possible. Promptly plant the peony in a sunny, well-drained site. Dividing large peony clumps requires more steps. After digging up the plant, gently shake the clump to remove loose soil from the root system. Divide the clump into sections, making sure each division has at least three to five "eyes" (buds) and a good portion of the root system. Peonies grow best in full sun and well drained soils. Dig a hole large enough for the entire root system. Place the peony plant in the hole so the eyes are 1 to 2 inches below the soil surface. (Peonies planted deeper than 2 inches often fail to bloom satisfactorily.) Fill the hole with soil, firming the soil as you backfill. Then water plants thoroughly. Space plants about 3 to 4 feet apart.

Transplanted peonies will not bloom well the first spring. They should be back to full flower production by the third or fourth year.

Beltsville Agricultural Research Center Tour

The Forum for Rural Innovation is sponsoring a bus trip to the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center on Thursday, November 4, 2009. The tour of the 7000 acre Beltsville Agriculture Research Center will cover a variety of agricultural topics (composting, honey bees, alternative fuels, food safety, parasitic disease, specialty crops & marketing). Registration forms available at www.loudounfarms.org under "Save the Date! November 4." \$35 registration fee includes transportation, snack and lunch. Pre-registration by October 21 required (space is limited). All participants must ride the bus. Bus leaves Purcellville at 7:30 a.m. and will return by 5:30 p.m. To register or for more information call 703-777-0426 or visit www.loudounfarms.org Sponsored by the Offices of Agricultural Economic Development and Cooperative Extension, Loudoun, Fauquier, Clarke, Frederick (VA), Jefferson & Berkeley (WV), Shenandoah & Potomac Headwaters RC&D.

Master Gardener Rain Garden Maintenance

Both rain gardens, Judicial Center and Baltimore Street, need weeding, etc. and MG's are committed to keeping them in shape. New class students may earn volunteer hours by helping with this activity. Any Master Gardener can earn volunteer hours for helping with this activity. Two scheduled workdays have been set up for September, 22 at 4pm and September, 29 at 4pm. For more information on this activity please contact Mary Palmer 304 - 754-5123 or Sandra Bernardi 304-267-6657.

Western Maryland Goat Sale & Field Day

The 2nd Annual Western Maryland Goat Field Day and Sale will be held Saturday, October 3, 2009, at the Washington County Agricultural Education Center (fairgrounds) near Boonsboro, Maryland. The fairgrounds are adjacent to the University of Maryland's Western Maryland Research & Education Center. Meat goat bucks from the Western Maryland Pasture-Based Meat Goat Performance Test that meet Gold, Silver, and Bronze standards for growth, parasite resistance, parasite resilience, and minimum standards for reproductive and structural soundness will be offered for sale via public auction. This year there are 60 goats on test. Last year, 10 out of 58 goats on test qualified for the sale. Thirty-four does have been consigned to the invitational doe sale. They include 25 fullblood, percentage and crossbred Kikos and 9 fullblood and percentage Boers. There are four yearling does and 30 doe kids. Doe consigners include ALL Boer Goats (MD), Losch's Riverview Farm Boer Goats (PA), Caprine Genetics (VA), Chey-View Acres (KY), Cedar Creek Farm (DE), and Don and Jenny Smith (VA). All of the goats will be sold via silent auction. In a silent auction, bidding is done on paper. The goats are not paraded through a sale ring. A silent auction gives bidders more time to consider their purchases. The bidding period will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The person with the highest bid at 2 p.m. gets the goat. The field day will be held from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Dr. Richard Browning, a research animal scientist from Tennessee State University, will be the featured speaker. Dr. Browning is in the midst of conducting a multi-year breed evaluation study, comparing Boer, Kiko, and Spanish goats and their reciprocal crosses. Running concurrent to the field day will be a goat skillathon for youth, ages 8 to 18. In the skillathon, youth will be tested on their knowledge of meat, dairy, and fiber goats. Pre-registration for the skillathon is requested by September 26. Information about the skillathon can be found at <http://www.sheepandgoat.com/programs/skillathon/goatskillathon.html>. Lunch will be available for purchase at the fairgrounds. Contact Susan Schoenian at (301) 432-2767 x343 or sschoen@umd.edu for information about the field day and sale and to pre-register youth for the skillathon.

Garden Tips

- Plant garden mums
- Harvest colored peppers
- Begin pumpkin harvest

Until next time ...Happy Gardening and Farming!