

Peerless Beauty

Now is the time to divide and care for peonies.

Fall is a wonderful time to plant things, but you can't always get what you want. Garden centers stock plants when people are in the mood to buy them. While gardeners maybe *should* be in a gardening mood in October, most are not, so growers are geared for spring sales. This fall, I was interested in planting a coral-colored peony. I phoned around, and some nurseries had a few leftover peonies but told me apologetically that most had lost their labels. Color unknown. Greer Gardens in Eugene still has a reasonable selection, but none in the color I want.

I've left it a bit late to order peonies by mail or Internet. There are several specialty peony nurseries in Oregon and Washington. A relatively new one that's getting rave reviews is Adelman Peony Gardens, just north of Salem. I have missed their fall window for shipping bare-root plants, but they have a large selection of container-grown peonies available from May 1 to June 15.

So I will probably wait. Meanwhile, the leaves of peonies already in the ground are turning lovely, luminous shades of apricot and red. Dormancy is approaching; if a peony needs dividing, this is the time to do it.

Peonies are the classic of flowers, large and richly colored but never gaudy. Garden essayist Henry Mitchell called them "the fattest and most scrumptious of all flowers, a rare fusion of fluff and majesty." He was writing about the most familiar garden peonies, varieties or hybrids of the herbaceous Chinese peony (*Paeonia lactiflora*). Their spring-into-summer blooms can be single, fully double or somewhere in between. The heavy-flowered doubles are the most sensuous and fragrant, but they need thorough staking in the garden. Peonies with fewer petals per flower usually stand up by themselves.

Tree peonies (bush peony would be a better name) have particularly large, sumptuous flowers in a broad range of colors, on woody stems that don't die down in winter and can reach six to eight feet in height. After 50 years of breeding efforts, hybrids between tree peonies and *P. lactiflora* are making news. Called intersectionals, they are herbaceous (the top growth dies in winter) but inherit the exotic flowers and color range of the tree peony. Unfortunately the plants are still expensive, with newcomers costing about \$150 apiece.

Since freshly planted peonies take a year

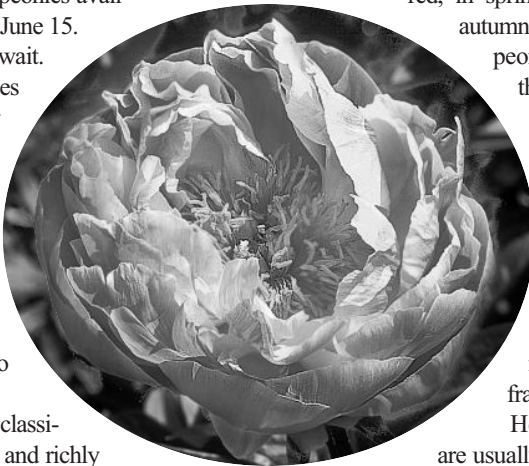
two to reach their full magnificence, it's worth thinking ahead. Even if you plan to plant in spring, pick a location now, before the summer garden collapses entirely. Peonies need plenty of sun and three or four feet of space uncrowded by neighbors. A good way to grow peonies, if you have room, is in a bed devoted to early blooming perennials such as Oriental poppies, Siberian or Japanese iris, foxgloves and columbines. Other good locations include the front of a shrub border, or in a vegetable or cutting garden. Being deep-rooted, they can even thrive in grass.

Gardeners always mutter about peonies taking up a lot of room for a few short weeks of bloom, but most still find reasons to grow them. Peonies live forever, resisting drought and deer. The scented flowers are glorious for cutting. The substantial leaves are good looking from the moment they emerge, gleaming

red, in spring to that bonus of autumn color. If you grow peonies especially for their scent, keep in mind that not all peonies are alike. Among Chinese peonies, doubles are generally sweeter than singles, and whites and light pinks are reputed to be most fragrant.

Herbaceous peonies are usually healthy, but if disease is a problem for you or your neighbors, cut the foliage down about now and destroy it. If peonies seem pale and weak and fail to bloom, the soil may be too acid. This is a good time to apply a handful of lime and one of a balanced organic fertilizer. If your peonies look perfectly healthy but don't bloom, check the base of the stems to find where the dormant buds are lurking. Buds should sit no more than an inch below soil level. Deeper planting inhibits flowering, and so can heavy annual mulches that gradually bury the crowns.

Dividing an old peony is no small undertaking. Healthy plants should bloom for years without division, so I wouldn't bother unless a plant seems way too big or you want to make more plants. Dig deep to get out most of the long, thick roots. Wash off the soil and separate into divisions with four or five buds. Replant in good, well-drained soil amended with compost and a handful of garden lime. Because they can live so long without disturbance, it's worth putting in some time to prepare the soil well. Make the hole wide but not too deep, or the plant may sink as the soil settles. **EW**



poppi's

Anatolia

"The Land East"

Traditional Greek & Indian Food
992 Willamette • Eugene, OR 97401 • 343-9661

Doak Creek

Native Plant Nursery

Fall is a great time to plant.
Native Containerized Plants, Trees, Shrubs,
Ground Covers & Wildflowers

484-9206
By Appt.
83331 JACKSON MARLOW RD. • EUGENE

FLOWERS • SALSA • NURSERY • EVERY DAY IS EARTH DAY FOR FARMERS • JAM • HONEY • BREADS

Find the best of the LOCAL Fall Harvest now TWO delicious days a week at

FARMERS' MARKET

SATURDAYS, 9-4 & TUESDAYS, 10-3
8TH & OAK, PARK BLOCKS, DOWNTOWN EUGENE

• COME ON DOWN to find the Best Locally Grown Fruits, Vegetables & Herbs; Plants, Proteins, Flowers, Food & FUN!
• COMING SOON HOLIDAY FARMERS MARKET, 5 weekends before Christmas at the Lane County Fairgrounds!

COME EARLY FOR THE BEST SELECTION! STAY FOR THE FUN!
FOR MORE INFORMATION or PRODUCT AVAILABILITY, CALL (541) 431-4923

PLANTS • VEGGIES • BUY LOCAL, BUY LAKE • SUPPORT LOCALLY GROWN CAMPAIGN • FRUIT • STARTS

ORGANICS HARVESTED FRESH FOR YOU

BULK ORGANIC HERBS •
ESSENTIAL OILS •
TEAS •
SPICES •
HERBAL PRODUCTS •

YOUR DIRECT SOURCE FOR FINE ORGANIC HERBAL PRODUCTS, SINCE 1987

OTCO CERTIFIED ORGANIC
16 YEARS EXPERIENCE
AHPA MEMBER
QUALITY CONTROL SUPERVISED
UNITED PLANT SAVERS CONTRIBUTOR

SHOP ONLINE AT:
WWW.MOUNTAINROSEHERBS.COM
FOR A FREE 64 PAGE CATALOG PLEASE CALL (800) 879-3337

mountain rose herbs .com

BRING BENEFIT

5% OF SALES FROM BOTH STORES WILL BE DONATED TO BRING RECYCLING'S PLANET IMPROVEMENT CENTER. **SUNDAY OCTOBER 17**

The Center will educate the broader community about reuse and sustainable practices and green building. BRING board members and staff will be there to show you the exciting plans and answer your questions.

bring

Practical Goods For Natural Living

2498 Willamette St. • 349-0556
532 Olive St. • 342-6820
MON-FRI 10AM-6PM
SAT 9AM-6PM & SUN 10AM-5PM
www.home2garden.com

DOWN TO EARTH
HOME, GARDEN & GIFT

UNIQUE EUGENE