

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 35

Peony

Description

In late spring or early summer, small dark-red shoots, which will soon resemble the peony, begin to appear. The peony is a hardy plant that grows to be 60-80 cm tall and has a similar spread. It has magnificent, large, satiny, multi-petaled blooms that can range in color from white to purple. With its fragrant blooms and the lush, dark-green foliage that stays brilliant all summer long, this is definitely a plant for all-season color.

Light

The peony requires a minimum of six hours of sunlight a day and prefers to be placed in a location with full sun for most of the day. Light shade in the afternoon is best, especially for pastel shades, which have a tendency to fade in hot sun.

Temperature

The peony grows successfully in zones 3-8. During the winter months it's wise to cover it with mulch if the temperature gets below -20° F. Mulching in summer can moderate soil temperature, as well as reduce weeds and maintain moisture in the soil.

Water

The soil should be kept moist and well drained. It's important to plant peonies away from trees and shrubbery because the plants will compete for water and nutrients.

Soil

A rich organic soil, proper drainage and a level of pH from 6.5 to 7.5 are excellent soil

conditions for a peony. A 10-10-10 fertilizer can be used to keep the plant vigorous. It is important not to place any fertilizer directly on the crown because doing so could injure developing shoots.

Pest and Diseases

Peonies are relatively pest and disease free except for two fungal diseases: botrytis and phytophthora blight. Botrytis will cause the buds to go black and the foliage to wilt. Ways to keep the disease at a minimum are to prune spent flowers before seeds drop, remove dead stems and leaves from the plant, and have good air circulation. Botrytis and phytophthora blight can also be controlled using fungicides.

Tips

For a peony to flower every year, the planting depth must be taken into account. A peony is a tuber, which means that if it's planted too deeply or shallowly it will not flower; therefore, the buds or the eyes should be planted 2.5 to 5 cm below the soil.

When the peony is in full bloom, it tends to be top heavy. Using a tomato or a peony cage will help to support the plant.

Although the peony doesn't like to be divided often, division is sometimes necessary. The best time to divide a peony is in the late fall. Each fleshy root division should have three to five eyes.

Even with minimum care, a peony will reward you with splendid flowers and attractive foliage for many years.

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