

# PEONIES

## *AN OLD FAVORITE*



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## History

- The genus *Paeonia* is native in the temperate and cold areas of the Northern Hemisphere
- There are species that are native to Asia, Europe, even Western North America
- Peonies' history in China, began in 1000 BC where they were first cultivated as wildflowers for their medicinal properties
- Peony seeds and roots were used to treat headaches, asthma, and childbirth pain
- What we would recognize as a more modern hybrid peony came to Europe in the 6th century as an epilepsy remedy



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- **Long-lived, perennial plants, may last from 50 to even 100 years**
- **Produce large flowers in the spring**
- **Myriad of species, colors and shapes**



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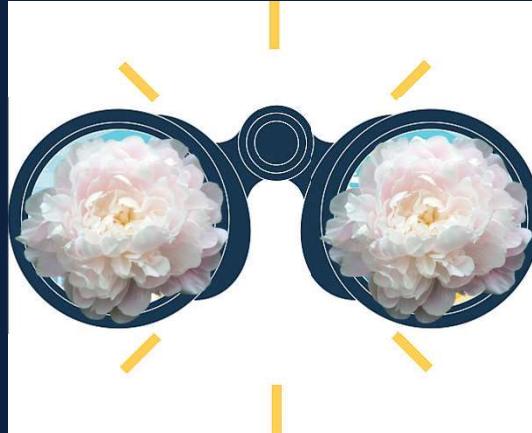
## A Breakdown of types

- **garden peonies or *herbaceous peonies* die back to the ground each fall/winter**
- **Tree or *woody peonies* – not really a tree, but a shrub will have woody stems that go dormant, characterized by strong woody stems that dormant and remain above the ground and re-sprout for several years**
- ***Itoh hybrids* (hybrids between woody and herbaceous peonies)**



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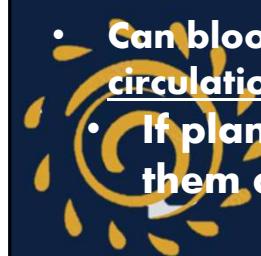
# Focus On Herbaceous Perennials



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## Siting - where to plant

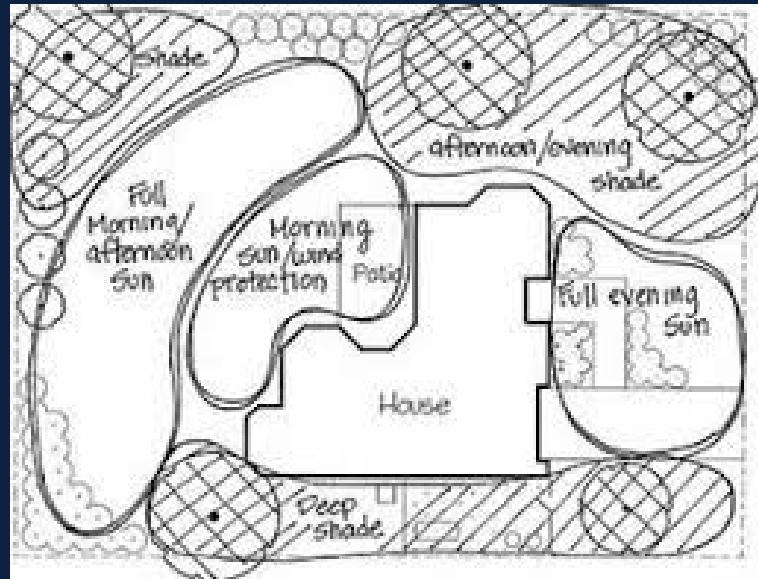
- **Peonies can tolerate a wide range of soil types but prefer well-drained soil with a pH of 6.0-7.0**
- **Can bloom in light shade, BUT do best in full sun with good air circulation**
  - **If planting together with other peonies or plants, space them at least 3 to 4 feet apart to help with air circulation**
- Try to site them in a “protected” area of your garden
  - Hot afternoon sun, strong winds and rain can make a mess of stems and blooms



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## Site Requirements

- Peonies require winter cold to flower. To encourage flowering, plant on a northern exposure and do not mulch in the winter.
- Flower size will decrease due to root competition from nearby trees and shrubs.
- Try to avoid locations where peonies have been grown before.



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## Planting

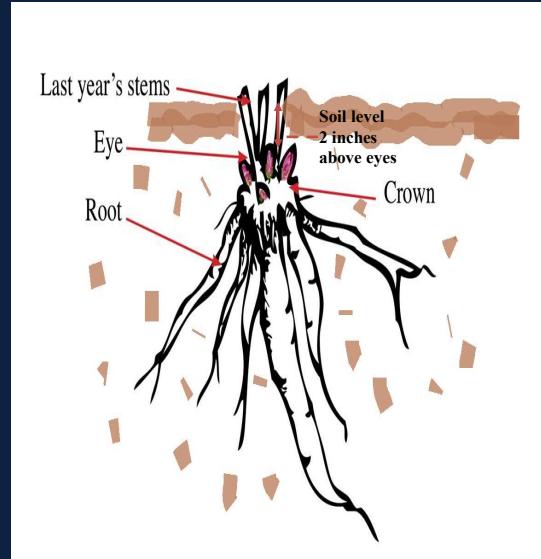
- The best time to plant peonies is in early fall — September and October are ideal.
- If planted in the spring, they may not bloom for a year or two.
- Purchase divisions containing 3 to 4 “eyes”; divisions with only one or two eyes normally take 3 to 5 years to flower.
- Be sure the divisions are free from rot when they are planted.
- Trim away any soft spots with a sharp knife.



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# Planting

- Dig a hole large enough to contain the plants root
- Remove the plant from the container and place it in the hole
- Make sure to plant the eyes not more than 2 inches below the soil surface
- Make sure to plant crown (where the stem meets the root) just at 2.5-3 " below the soil surface
- DO NOT PLANT TOO DEEP
- PEONIES WILL FAIL TO BLOOM IF PLANTED TOO DEEP
- If you have established peonies that aren't blooming they may be planted too deep
  - can be dug up and replanted at the proper height in the fall



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# After planting

- **Water Well!!! water a newly planted peony**
- **need more water for the first season they are planted**
- **Watering slowly and deeply is optimal for new planting**
  - **Peonies have a very long tap root and can soak up water from deep down**
  - **Amount of water needed will depend on how much rain it has rained lately**
  - **Overly wet conditions however can cause root rot, especially if soil has poor drainage**
  - **REMEMBER: Once established, Peonies are relatively drought resistant**
  - **Avoid excessive nitrogen fertilization as it encourages foliage at the expense of blooms**



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## TIPS

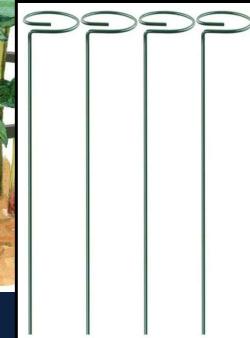
- **After peonies bloom snip the old blooms/seed pods off (Deadheading)**
- **Cutting old blooms/seed pods allows all energy to be stored by the plant**



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## Problems, Pest, and Diseases

- **Due to heavy flowers and buds, many plants may need to be staked**
- **Strong winds or rain can wreak havoc with stems and blossoms so try to plant in a protected area**
- **Peonies are relatively pest and disease resistance with the exception of . . .**



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- **Botrytis Blight** (causes withered buds, wilting leaves, attacks stems, leaves, and flower buds) → 
- **Leaf Blotch** (looks like irregular brownish-purple spots on leaves) → 
- **Powdery Mildew** (looks like white dust on leaves) → 

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## Ants are commonly seen on peony blooms

- Are not a threat to plant health
- Ants are attracted to the sweet nectar produced in peony buds

**Ants!**



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Diseases are rarely lethal to peonies and can be managed by...

1. Diligent removal of all above-ground plant material each **fall** after frost
2. Proper spacing of plants for good air circulation
3. Avoiding excessive watering



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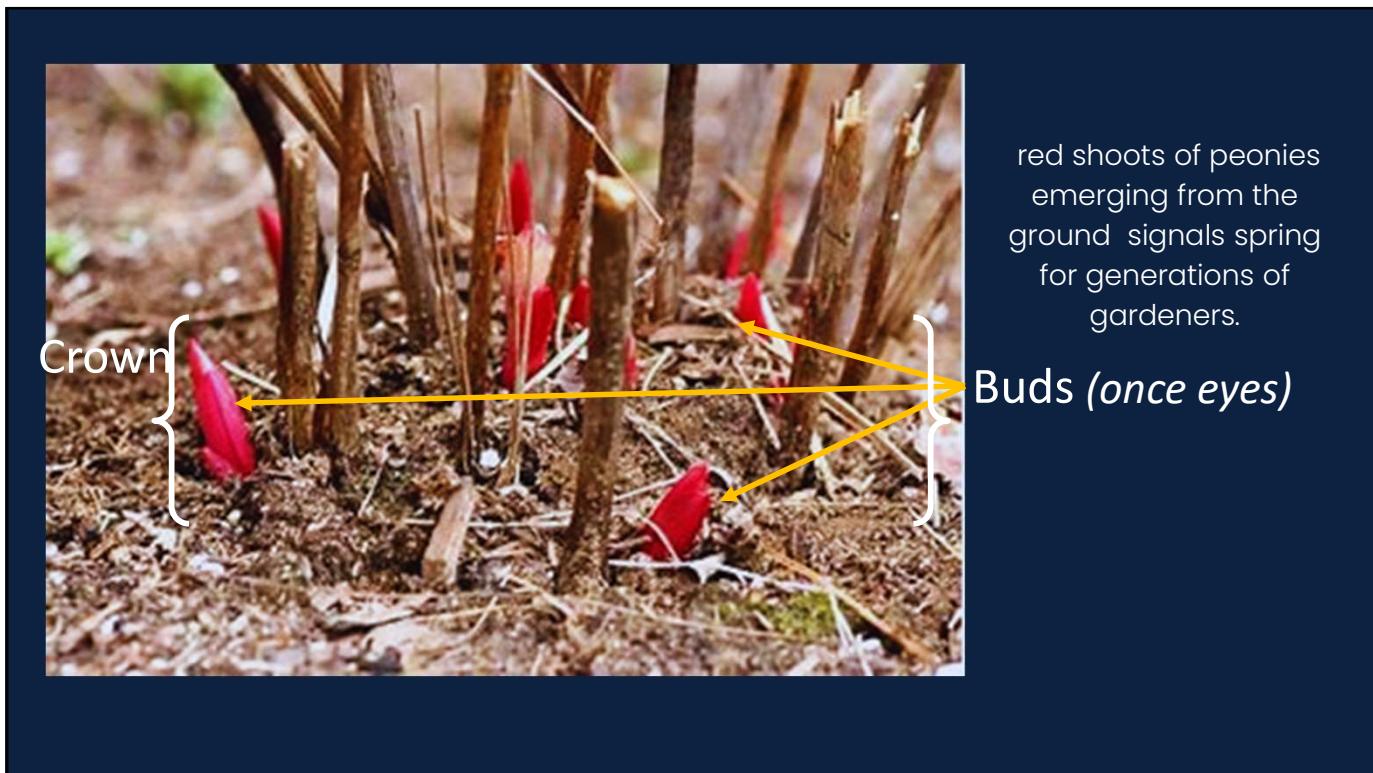
## TIPS

- Peonies are usually a short blooming perennial flower.
- A great way to have longer bloom time is grow different varieties of peonies that all bloom at different times
- May get bit of overlap between different varieties that will make it seem like you have peonies in bloom for longer
- After peonies finish blooming what's left is a nice mound of foliage
- Do not cut them to the ground as soon as they are finished blooming
- Let the plant grow all summer as it is making and storing energy the plant will need for next year's blooms
- Peonies do not respond well to transplanting and reestablish slowly
- Divide and replant only after they become crowded — usually after 10 to 15 years
- Fall is the best time to divide when swollen, red buds are clearly visible

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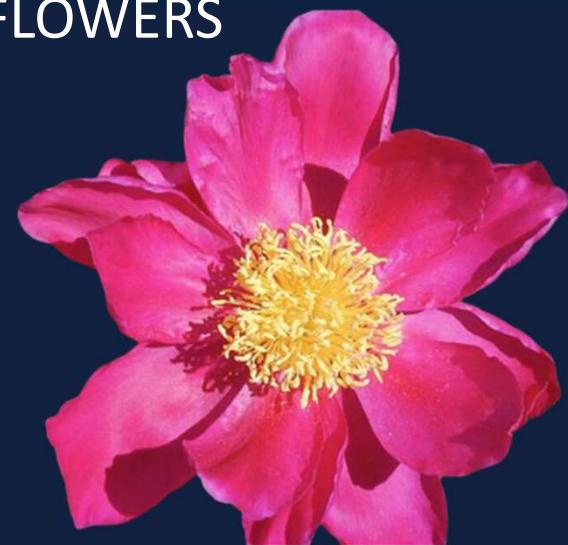
**Most peonies  
have  
unforgettable  
fragrance, are  
unexcelled for  
cutting and  
may live 40–  
50 years even  
as long as 100  
years**



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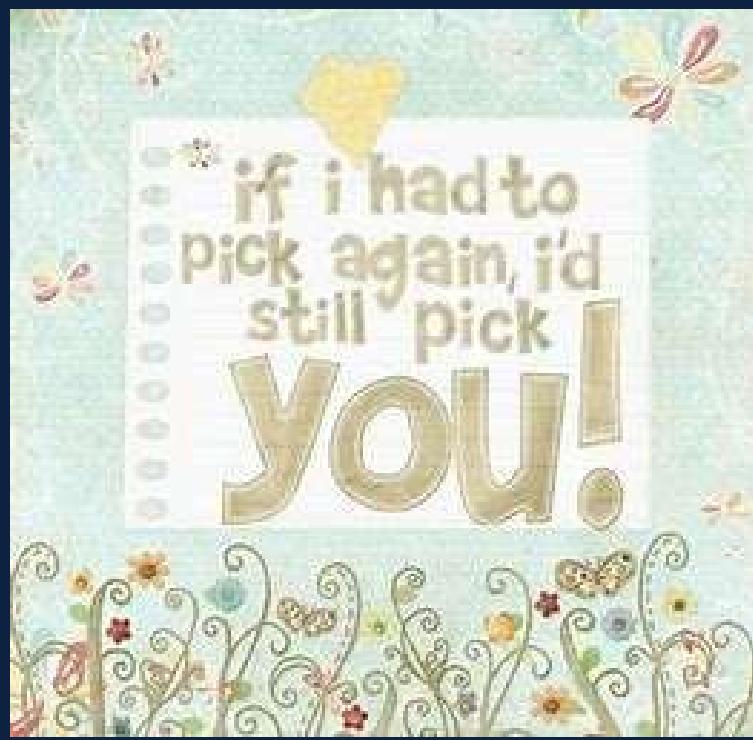
## HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS SORTED BY 5 TYPES OF FLOWERS

1. Single
2. Semidouble
3. Double
4. Japanese
5. Anemone



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## Some favorites



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## Festiva Maxima

*Paeonia lactiflora 'Festiva Maxima'*

Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial

Geographic Origin: Europe

Plant Size: 2-3 feet

Sun Exposure: Partial Shade to Full Sun

Plant Zone: 3-8

Festiva Maxima is a fluffy double white peony with flecks of red in the center. This peony is large and heavy and will need to be staked If possible plant in a protected area



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## Coral Sunset

*Paeonia lactiflora 'Coral Sunset'*

Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial

Geographic Origin: America

Plant Size: 2-3 feet

Sun Exposure: Partial Shade to Full Sun

Plant Zone: 3-8

The vibrant coral color on this peony is unexpected and beautiful. It is a semi double flower that has coral petals and a fluffy yellow interior. These peonies are sturdy and do not require staking and are one of the first peonies to bloom in the garden. It's a cheery spring color.



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## Francoise Ortegat

*Paeonia lactiflora 'Francoise Ortegat'*

Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial

Geographic Origin: Europe

Plant Size: 2-3 feet

Sun Exposure: Partial Shade to Full Sun

Plant Zone: 3-8

Francoise Ortegat is a deep velvety red variety that is over 150 years old. It is a beautiful dark magenta color and very fragrant. The blossoms are deeply ruffled and very intricate. This variety makes excellent cut flowers. This variety will require staking as it has very big heavy blooms.



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## Solange

*Paeonia lactiflora 'Solange'*

Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial

Geographic Origin: Asia

Plant Size: 2-3 feet

Sun Exposure: Partial Shade to Full

Sun

Plant Zone: 3-8

Solange is a beautiful big fluffy double peony. It is a white peony with just the slightest blush of light pink. It is very ruffled and beautiful. Its large flowers will require staking. It makes a beautiful cut flower, it would be stunning in a wedding bouquet



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## Pillow Talk

*Paeonia lactiflora 'Pillow Talk'*

Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial

Geographic Origin: America

Plant Size: 2-3 feet

Sun Exposure: Partial Shade to Full Sun

Plant Zone: 3-8

Pillow Talk is a gorgeous soft pink double flowering variety that fades to a creamy white color in the center. It is similar to the very popular Sarah Bernhardt peony if you cannot find Pillow Talk. It is a profusion of pink double blossoms that are great for cutting. This variety's large double flowers will probably need staking



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## Feliz Crousse

*Paeonia lactiflora 'Feliz Crousse'*

Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial

Geographic Origin: America

Plant Size: 2-3 feet

Sun Exposure: Partial Shade to Full Sun

Plant Zone: 3-8

Feliz Crousse is a fabulous magenta double flowering variety. It is showy with lots of layers of ruffled petals, and it is also a beautifully fragrant variety. This variety is heavy and will probably need staked. These make incredible cut flowers.



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## Edulis Superba

*Paeonia lactiflora 'Edulis Superba'*

Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial

Geographic Origin: Asia, Europe

Plant Size: 2-3 feet

Sun Exposure: Partial Shade to Full Sun

Plant Zone: 3-8

Edulis Superba is a great extra early blooming variety. It is a very old heirloom variety that is very fragrant. It has medium sized bright pink double flowers. They make wonderful, early, cut flowers. The double flowers in this peony may require staking



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## Do Tell

*Paeonia lactiflora 'Do Tell'*

Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial

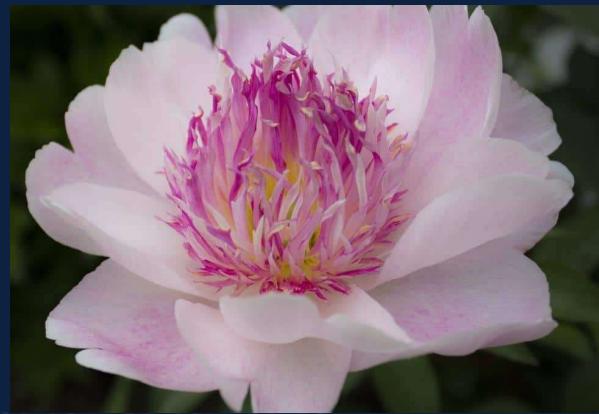
Geographic Origin: Asia, Europe

Plant Size: 2-3 feet

Sun Exposure: Partial Shade to Full Sun

Plant Zone: 3-8

Do Tell is a large Japanese-type inflorescence that combines a gradient of pale pink on the outer petals and pinnate staminodes that are pale pink to almost red. This variety has sturdy stems that usually do not require staking.



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## Goldilocks

*Paeonia lactiflora 'Goldilocks'*

Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial

Geographic Origin: America

Plant Size: 2-3 feet

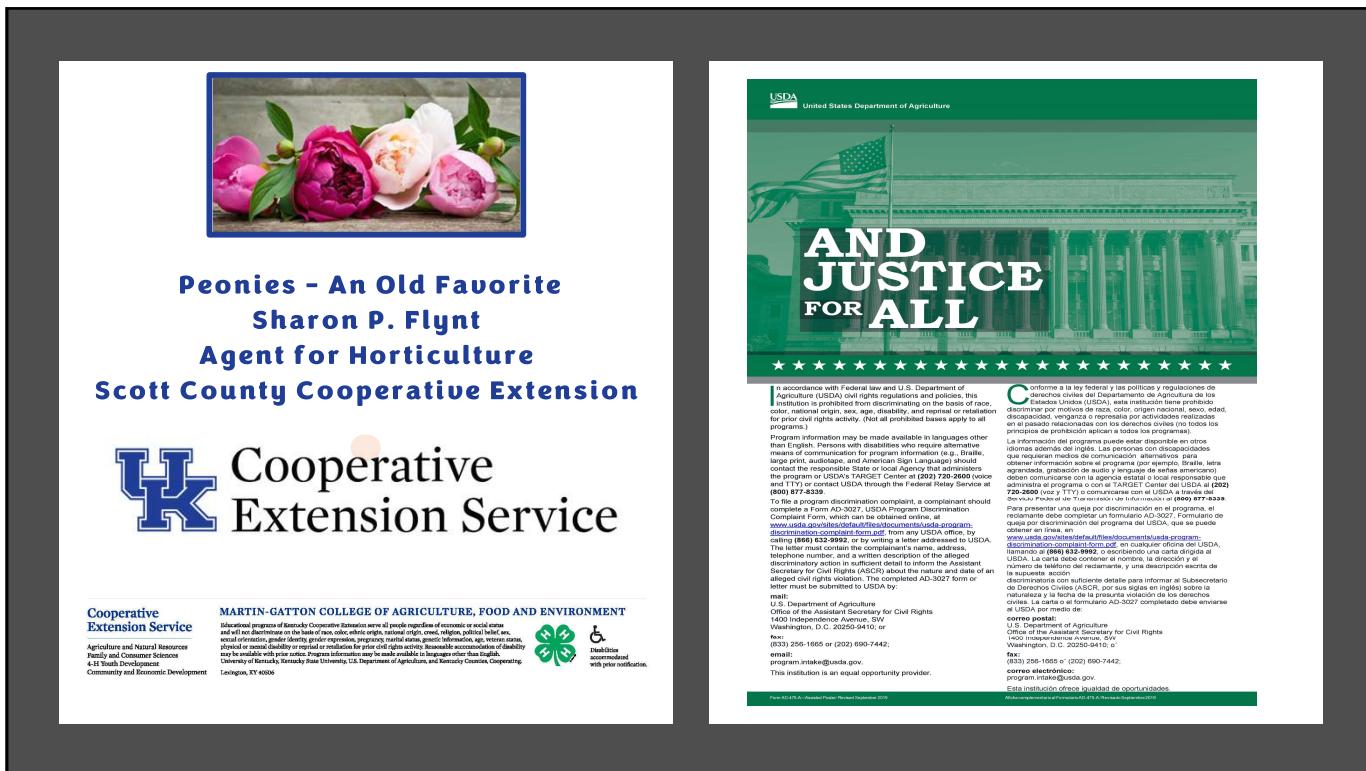
Sun Exposure: Partial Shade to Full Sun

Plant Zone: 3-8

Goldilocks is a beautiful double peony. It has large outer petals and then a bomb of fluffy inner petals. The whole flower is a beautiful pale butter yellow color. I love this pure yellow color, they would make excellent cut flowers. I think the soft yellow color is an unexpected surprise in a peony. The large double flowers will most likely require staking



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## RESOURCES

## Heartland Peony Society Type of Peony Flowers

[http://www.peonies.org/flower\\_types.html](http://www.peonies.org/flower_types.html)

Scientific Name: *Paeonia lactiflora* 'Goldilocks'  
Plant Type: Herbaceous Perennial  
Geographic Origin: America  
Plant Size: 2-3 feet

North Carolina State Extension NC State Extension Publications  
<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/peonies-for-the-home-landscape>  
Peonies for the Home Landscape

University of Florida Gardening Solutions, 10 Important Things to Consider When Planning Your Landscape Design  
<https://gardensolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/ten-planning-tips-for-design.html>

Epic Gardening Peony Varieties: 41 Different Type[es of cultivars  
<https://www.epicgardening.com/peony-varieties/>

A close-up photograph of a peony bush in full bloom. The flowers are a mix of white and light pink, with some buds still on the stems. The leaves are dark green and serrated. The background is a solid blue.

New York Botanical Garden Plant and Research  
Guides  
<https://libguides.nybg.org/treepeonies>

Michigan State University Extension  
<https://www.canr.msu.edu/outreach/about>

