



*Adding Color to Your Life*

## **Planting and Growing Peonies in Wyoming**

In general, peonies are hardy to Zone 2. They need a cold period to initiate flowering, so warmer regions farther to the south are not good locations for these plants. They bloom in early to mid spring, in a variety of flower colors ranging from white to red, which may have either a single or double row of petals. Peonies usually grow to be about 2-3 feet tall, and may need to be caged to keep them standing upright instead of flopping over onto any neighboring plants. They need to be planted in full sun and need semi-well-drained soil to prevent root rot. Amending the soil with compost helps to increase drainage and available nutrients.

### **Planting**

Peonies may be purchased either bareroot or container grown. Bareroot peonies are usually available during the fall, and container-grown peonies are available during the normal growing season. When planting peonies, dig a hole that is just slightly larger than the container, or the bareroot plant. The “eyes” (or buds) should only be 1-1 ½” below the soil surface. Make sure to plant bareroot plants right side up with the eyes pointing up and the fibrous roots pointing down. Space plants 3-4 feet apart to allow for the mature size. Peonies will appreciate a winter mulch layer to keep them slightly warmer, although it is not necessary.

Peonies should be divided in the fall when necessary. To divide the plant, lift the entire root in the fall and using a sharp knife, divide the root into sections with at least 1 eye on each section, or at least 3 eyes on each section for more rapid flowering. Replant the peonies into soil that has been amended with organic matter such as compost.

### **Problems**

The largest problem faced with growing peonies is the failure to bloom. There are many myths as to why this problem occurs, including, “There have to be ants to make it blossom.” Ants are not necessary to make a peony bloom. Ants are attracted to a secretion produced by the peony flower, and therefore are on peonies when they bloom. The ants remove the sticky secretion from the bud, which allows the flowers to open more easily. Usually the reason for this failure to blossom is either the peony root is too deep in the soil, or the root was too small (or young) when planted. A small root with only one or two eyes may need to grow several seasons before it has stored enough energy to produce flowers. Purchased peony roots or plants should be mature enough to produce flowers within one or two years if planted at the proper depth. The problem with small roots usually comes from divisions made in one’s own garden.

If the roots become too crowded, the plant will flower, but the flowers will drop from the plant. If this happens, divide the roots in the fall as described above.