Care Sheet for Peonies

Peony roots may be planted anytime from late August through late March when the ground isn’t frozen. However, the best planting time is in the fall months of late August through November. Herbaceous peonies do best in sunny, well drained locations yet they will tolerate partial shade. Too much shade will restrict their bloom quality and amount.

Before planting, soak peony roots in water for six hours if they were allowed to dry out. The soil should be well tilled prior to planting. It is best to cultivate and mix compost before planting. After soil is prepared, dig a hole large enough to accommodate the root system. The eyes should be about two inches below the soil surface. Southern gardeners should plant peonies somewhat shallower than in the North. In the South, place the eyes at ground level or at one inch in depth. Place the root in the hole and fill with soil. Tamp gently and water thoroughly.

Spacing for peonies is 3 to 4’ between each peony plant. Mulching the new roots the first winter is suggested. Late fall planting in colder areas should be mulched and/or mounded with extra soil. The extra soil or mulch should be removed in the spring.

Peonies should not be over-fertilized. Any good, complete garden fertilizer that is not too rich in nitrogen would be fine. Fertilizer should be applied when the spring foliage is around 6 - 8” tall, placing it around the drip line of the leaves. Rose food and conservative applications of bone meal are especially ideal for peonies. Over fertilization may reduce flowering.

Botrytis is the most common disease problem and is most prevalent during wet seasons. Watch for young shoots that have rotted off at the base and have developed a dense gray mold early in the season. Blasted buds or blooms are also indications of infection. Careful sanitation is the most important aspect of controlling botrytis fungus. Regular inspection for the plant and removal of any infected leaves is the best procedure for control. When foliage turns brown in the late fall, it can be cut back to the ground and discarded. This prevents carryover of any foliage disease spores that might be present.