

HOME & GARDEN

Careful planting ensures pleasing peonies

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Between the welcome rain we have had and the glorious weather this past weekend, the flower garden is giving a last sigh of loveliness before closing down for the winter.

My new roses have put out a few pink blossoms, so pale and gentle amidst most of the brilliant fall color, and even the achillea and lavender have put out a few final blooms.

The chrysanthemums are still a mass of luxuriant bloom and will probably be flowering for a while yet. I try to keep up with removing the dead flowers, but I expect it will be November before I have to trim off all the flower heads. When it looks like winter is finally on its way around Thanksgiving, the chrysanthemums should be cut back to 3 or 4 inches. The plants are very hardy and don't necessarily need mulching, but a layer of hay or evergreen

boughs applied after the ground has frozen will help keep the plants from heaving during the winter and will give a little protection if we have another snowless winter.

I had one especially welcome chore to do last weekend. My anniversary peonies, Pillow Talk, a soft pink, and Pink Parfait, a strong pink with silvery edges, arrived from White Flower Farms. By the time I had given the Sunday papers the once over and drunk a leisurely second cup of coffee the sun was high and golden and warm. (On these frosty mornings it warms up faster outside than it does in the house.) Then outdoors to do a hundred dollar job of planting the peony roots. Peonies need never be moved and they will flourish for generations, so it is worthwhile to spend a little extra time when planting. They will require very little care after that.

A peony hole should be deep, about 2 feet, and

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about 3 feet in diameter. Don't try any shortcuts. If you run into poor subsoil, keep that separate and cart it away. Replace it with good rich garden soil that you have mixed with humus compost and some bone meal. Peonies are not terribly fussy about the soil they grow in, but they will repay some special treatment.

Care should be taken not to let the new roots come in contact with any form of cow manure, but I put potted manure way in the bottom of the hole where it will be available when the plant is well established.

It is vital to plant peony roots only 1 or 2 inches below the top of the soil. Any deeper and they may not bloom for years. Firm the topsoil well

and water deeply after planting. It is a good idea to mulch the roots the first year after planting, but peonies are very hardy and mulching isn't necessary after that.

The peonies I planted last fall are still green, but soon we'll have a black frost and it will be time to take a sharp razor and cut the stems off just below the soil level, always taking care not to slice off any of the new buds that are already forming. These stems should be burned or carted off to the dump and not composted because they can cause the spread of disease. After cutting the stems, sprinkle the ground with sulphur to discourage botrytis blight which can destroy the roots.

Peonies provide extravagant bloom in the spring and then the foliage stays lush and thick until frost so peonies are an asset to any landscaping plan. There is also a peony type and color to suit every taste. Most of us think of

double peonies when we think "Peony," a large fragrant flower with masses of petals. They come in white shades like Bowl of Cream and Festive Maxima which has been a popular and standard peony for generations. They also come in pink shades like Dainty Lass, a soft shell pink, and Mrs. F. D. Roosevelt, a deep pink, and crimson shades like Kansas which is a bright red.

There are also single and Japanese peonies which are not so popular or common, but they are lovely in their simplicity. Though they are single, they are not small and they come in white, pink and red.

There is even a tree peony which grows to 4 or 5 feet and when mature will produce up to 75 blossoms a year. They are hardy, have the same cultural requirements as regular peonies and will last for as long as 90 years. White Flower Farm offers as many tree peonies as they do regular peonies in a full range of colors.