



# peony



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Photo courtesy of Pacific Flower Shippers

*Paeonia lactiflora*  
Chinese peony, Common garden peony

### BOTANICAL NAME

*Paeonia lactiflora*  
(pee-OWN-ee-uh lak-ti-FLOR-uh)

*Paeonia officinalis*  
(pee-OWN-ee-uh o-fis-i-NAH-lis)

### COMMON NAMES

Chinese peony, Common garden peony  
(*P. lactiflora*)

Common peony, Wild peony,  
European wild peony (*P. officinalis*)

### DESCRIPTION

Peony blooms are large, frequently up to 6 inches in diameter, and have tissue-like petals. Flower forms include single; double; semidouble; Japanese (single, with large yellow centers); and anemone (single, with powder-puff centers). Many peony varieties emanate delightful scents.

### COLORS

Hues include a multitude of pinks and reds as well as purple, salmon, apricot, white, ivory/cream, yellow and bicolors.

### VASE LIFE

If properly cared for from farm to florist, peonies will give consumers two to seven days of vase life, depending on variety and stage of development when harvested (see *Purchasing Checklist*).

### AVAILABILITY

Peonies are available from both domestic and foreign growers from March through August, with peak season being April, May and June. Many white varieties bloom early in the season—something to remember when selling white peonies for special events.

## vase-life extenders

**PROCESSING** Immediately remove peonies from the shipping boxes. These flowers are susceptible to *Botrytis* (gray mold), which can rot the entire flower heads. *Botrytis* loves dark, moist environments, such as inside shipping boxes, and thrives with changes in shipping temperature. Remove any flowers contaminated with *Botrytis* from the bunch(es), and notify your supplier.

After checking flower quality, recut the stems with a sharp knife or pruner, removing at least 1 inch of stem. Immediately after cutting, dip or place the stem ends into a

hydration solution, then place them into containers half filled with warm (100 F to 110 F) properly proportioned flower-food solution. The hydration solution will help the flowers absorb flower-food solution after being shipped or stored dry.

**REFRIGERATION** After processing, place peonies into a floral cooler at 33 F to 35 F, and allow them to hydrate for at least two hours before using or selling them. Depending on variety, peonies can begin opening almost immediately after being placed into flower-food solution, but immediate refrigeration can slow that process.

**WATER** Peonies are heavy drinkers, so check their nutrient solution level often.

**CARE EXTRA** If peonies appear wilted or otherwise water stressed, submerge the stems, up to the blooms, in room-temperature water for 20 minutes before processing them.

**ETHYLENE SENSITIVITY** Peonies do not appear to be affected by ethylene gas.

**DRY STORAGE** If you don't need peonies immediately, you can store bud-stage blooms dry (out of water) in a floral cooler at 33 F to 35 F for up to three weeks. Opening blooms, however, must be placed into flower-food solution immediately.

## fun facts

**WHAT'S IN A NAME** The genus *Paeonia* is said to have been named for Paeon, a physician to the Greek gods and reputed discoverer of the flowers' legendary medicinal properties, which were known to cure "21 ills."

**FAMILY MATTERS** Peonies are members of the small *Paeoniaceae* family, the only other member of which is *Glaucidium*, a poppylike flower. There are about 33 species of peonies (the two most commonly grown as cut flowers are *P. lactiflora* and *P. officinalis*), and there are approximately 2,600 varieties.

**HOME SWEET HOME** Peonies are native to Europe, Asia and the west coast of North America. Today, as cut flowers, the double-flowered varieties are the most common in the United States while the single-flowered varieties are widely sold in Europe and Asia. **sfr**

Some information provided by:

- The American Peony Society, [www.americanpeonysociety.org](http://www.americanpeonysociety.org)
- Botanica, by R.G. Turner Jr. and Ernie Wasson
- Chain of Life Network®, [www.chainoflife.org](http://www.chainoflife.org)
- Dictionary of Plant Names, by Allen J. Coombes
- Florists' Review, [www.floristsreview.com](http://www.floristsreview.com)
- Hortus Third, by Liberty Hyde Bailey and Ethel Zoe Bailey
- Stearn's Dictionary of Plant Names for Gardeners, by William T. Stearn

## purchasing checklist

Purchase peonies in the "puffy" stage, when the buds are about to open. Growers cut each variety at a different stage of bud development to ensure flower opening, but most varieties are cut in a tight bud stage, with only a trace of color visible. This keeps the blooms from getting damaged in transit and allows for the longest possible vase life. Avoid opening or fully open blossoms, but watch out for overly tight buds as well because they will never open. Also check carefully for signs of bruising, rot or *Botrytis* (gray mold).