

Growing Peonies

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3-02-22

If there was such a thing as a perfect perennial, the peony would be near the top of the list. Planted and cared for correctly, it will continue to offer gorgeous flowers year after year. Keep in mind that there are two types of peonies: Tree peonies and herbaceous peonies, the latter being the most frequently planted type here in El Dorado County and the one discussed in this article.

Given a good start, herbaceous peonies will flourish for decades. Fall is the best time to plant the rhizomes; always be sure they have at least three “eyes”, which are small nodules on the rhizome. Position the rhizomes with the eyes facing upward no deeper than two inches below the soil surface. Planting depth is crucial because peonies will not bloom if they are planted too deeply. In addition, peonies do best if planted in an area that gets six or more hours of sun exposure. They also need good soil drainage and a prolonged winter chill period. Peonies can also be planted in spring but do best when they’ve settled in place about six weeks before the ground freezes. If planted in the spring, they may lag behind about a year longer than those planted in the fall.

If planting several peonies, space them three to four feet apart; they need proper air circulation. Peonies are fairly drought tolerant once established but should be watered more often in the spring when they are putting on new growth. Once the flowers have faded, cut the flower stalks off. Peonies do not need fertilizer; all that is required is perhaps a top dressing of humus every year. After hard frosts hit in winter, all the stems can be cut back to the ground.

It is a myth that peonies need ants crawling on them in order to bloom. Peony buds have small nectar-producing glands on the scales that cover the flower buds, and ants love this nectar. They will not do damage to the flowers and will tend to repel other bugs that might eat the flowers.

There is no prettier flower in spring than a peony and there are many colors to choose from. Plan on putting a few or several in the landscape this year.

Master Gardener classes are offered monthly throughout the county. You can find our class schedule at: http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public_Education_Classes/?calendar=yes&g=56698, and recorded classes on many gardening topics here: http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public_Education/Classes/.

The Sherwood Demonstration Garden is open Friday’s and Saturdays March through October. The garden can be found at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville. Please check our website for more details https://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/Demonstration_Garden/

Mark your calendar for our annual plant sales in April! Edible plant sale including fruit, veggies and herbs will be on Saturday, April 16, 2022, 8:00AM · 2:00PM. Choose your favorite edibles and shop our incredible tomato selection grown and cared for locally by Master Gardener volunteers! The ornamental

plant sale will take place on Saturday, April 30, 2022, 8:00AM · 2:00PM. We will have a huge selection of trees, shrubs, grasses, succulents, native and perennial plants. Location: Sherwood Demonstration Garden 6699 Campus Drive, Placerville. <http://ucanr.edu/edcsale>

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard to answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the “Ask a Master Gardener” option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We’ll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see [http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener e-news](http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener_e-news).