

Paeonia lactiflora

Herbaceous Peony



Paeonia lactiflora 'Fesitva Maxima'



Paeonia lactiflora 'Do Tell'

Description

PLANT NAME *Paeonia lactiflora*
(pay-OH-nee-ah lak-ti-FLOOR-uh)

FAMILY Ranunculaceae (Buttercup
Family)

NATIVITY Temperate East Asia

HARDINESS USDA Zones 3-8

Key ID Traits

Paeonia lactiflora is a long-lived durable plant. Grown and hybridized for over 2,000 years in China, its handsome foliage compensates for its short bloom time. It boasts hundreds of cultivars and is deer resistant.

FORM Herbaceous peonies grow in clumps with mounds of foliage 2-3 feet (0.6-0.9 m) tall and wide. Flowers are held above the leaves.

FOLIAGE Leaves are alternate, usually ternate or biternately compounds that measure 6-8 inches (15.2-20.3 cm). Leaflets are entire or sometimes lobed. New shoots are bronze and some cultivars have a burgundy fall color.

FLOWER Flowers are fragrant and measure 3-6 inches (7.6-15.2 cm) wide. The species is typically white but pinks and reds also exist. Hybrids have flowers in white, yellow, pink, coral, and red. They bloom in late spring and a cultivar will bloom in about 10 days with doubles blooming longer than singles.



Culture

LIGHT Herbaceous peonies grow best in full sun.

SOIL *Paeonia lactiflora* prefers deep, well-drained soil of high fertility and organic matter, tolerating average fertility. It may need watering during drought.

PROPAGATION 5-7 years are required to get a blooming plant from seed. Division should take place in the fall so each piece has three to five “eyes” (buds) and good roots. Set plants so the base of the buds is 2 inches (5.1 cm) from the soil surface as deeper planting results in little or no bloom.

PESTS & DISEASES Botrytis blight and phytophthora blight is a concern as it causes foliage to wilt, turn black, and die. To avoid this, give your plant good air circulation and good sanitation. Spraying may be needed for botrytis. Leaf spots and Japanese beetles are also an occasional problem. Ants do no harm.

MAINTENANCE *Paeonia lactiflora* should be fertilized after blooming. Dying foliage should be left on for as long as possible since it continues to help with photosynthesis, which provides food in the fall for the expanding roots. All foliage should be cut down before winter.

Selected Species and Cultivars

Paeonia lactiflora has hundreds of cultivars including *Paeonia lactiflora* ‘Festiva Maxima’, ‘Sarah Bernhardt’, ‘Do Tell’ and ‘Petite Porcelain’. *Paeonia obovata* subsp. *japonica*, a related species found in Japan and Korea, grows about 18 inches high, produces single white or blush flowers in May, and displays beautiful seed pods in late summer.



Paeonia lactiflora ‘Charm’



Paeonia lactiflora ‘Sarah Bernhardt’



Paeonia lactiflora ‘Petite Porcelain’

Comments

When planting, be sure to allow for 3 feet (0.9 m) of space per plant and prepare the soil carefully. Peonies may live for 30 years or more in the same spot and prefer to not be disturbed.