

Paeonies - Care Guide

Herbaceous - Growing Guide

Paeony

There are many gorgeous herbaceous paeonies which are all garden bred and raised forms of *P. lactiflora*. This article deals in detail with only a few of the unusual species which Burncoose offers but the treatment, habits and care required to grow them applies equally to all the named hybrids of *P. lactiflora* which are featured on the website. All the paeonies we offer flower in April to June.

Paeonies are fully hardy but their new young shoots can occasionally be damaged by severe late frosts. Where this happens to mature clumps they will simply produce more shoots. They like rich, fertile made up ground in a well-drained situation and preferably in full sun or lightly dappled shade. A heavy autumn mulch is worthwhile. The mature leaves and flowers definitely do need plant supports since the weight of their enormous flowers is too much to cope with strong wind and rain.

Herbaceous paeony clumps can be lifted and carefully divided preferably in the autumn rather than the spring after clearing up the dead leaves. This is because they have thick tuberous rootstocks which extend deep into the ground and they resent being dug and moved; taking time to re-establish. Root cuttings rather than divisions can be cut from the roots and set in dryish trays of peat or soil over winter to re-establish young plants in the spring. Seed takes two to three years to germinate so division is much easier and it is better to remove any seed heads than allow young plants to waste energy on seed production.

P. mlokosewitschii, 'Molly the Witch' for those who find this rare species impossible to pronounce, is slow growing and expensive but one of the true gems in the paeony world. The species comes from the Caucasus and has bluish-grey leaves divided into nine ovate leaflets which are

slightly hairy underneath. The flowers are single, bowl shaped and a lemon yellow. They are 4-5in across with broad petals and yellow stamens. The finest original clump (with named hybrids) that I have seen is at Borde Hill gardens in Sussex. This paeony grows to 2-3ft overall with a larger spread when mature.

P. potaninii (syn. *P. delavayi* var. *angustifolia*) despite its association with other tree paeonies is a lowish growing herbaceous paeony with a suckering habit and filigree leaves which grow only to around 2ft in height with us at Burncoose in an advanced mound. Its flowers are a striking red or reddish purple and usually appear in May. It is also a rare and unusual species which is much sought after.

Images need adding

Tree - Growing Guide

There is much botanical muddle and confusion about the naming of the most popular and commonly grown tree paeonies. These are most commonly called *P. ludlowii* (a single yellow flower) and *P. delavayi* (a single red or deep crimson flower). Both varieties grow well at Caerhays and Burncoose where they flower profusely in April and May and self-seed themselves in mixtures of colours here and there in borders or bare patches of soil in the woodland garden. Botanists would be appalled at such a travesty of the true or correct naming but when you see *P. delavayi* listed in four different multiple forms and *P. ludlowii* listed also as *lutea* var. *ludlowii* not to mention *P. delavayi* var. *lutea* you can begin to see why I have tried to keep it simple. These two tree paeonies hybridise between themselves a lot.

Both these tree paeonies are deciduous suckering shrubs with only a few branches which soon form good clumps which grow 4ft in height in an exposed position and perhaps 6ft in shelter. The flowers are cup shaped and about 2in across with conspicuous leafy bracts beneath the flowers. Very occasionally the new growth on tree paeonies will get frosted but they are strong enough to recover quickly. Otherwise totally hardy and a welcome backdrop to a herbaceous or shrub border or as a freestanding

clump in a woodland context. We cannot see much less of a flowering performance in shade than in full sun.

Regrettably, we seldom seem to find time to prune our tree paeonies every few years. They do not seem to mind, but the reference books say that you should take out perhaps one in three of the mature woody stems to encourage more flowers in the second year after pruning. If the plant is suckering well it will probably save you the job.

These two tree paeonies are easily grown from seed although they can sometimes be slow to all germinate at once. Sow in the autumn in containers as soon as the three-part ripe seed heads split to reveal the black seeds which is usually in late August or September.

The other tree paeonies which we offer are named forms of *Paeonia suffruticosa* in a variety of colours and flower sizes from single to double and semi-double. These come to us direct from China and all have Chinese names with English translations or interpretations. Since the (indirect) Chinese suppliers have always been rather vague as to names and colours you must, I fear, expect a few 'cock-ups'. These are grafted plants with single stems when you get them but will develop into slightly branched sub-shrubs which will need staking and supports when they produce large flowers. Like most tree paeonies their mature leaves have nine lobes. Many of these varieties can grow to 5-6ft but they will take up little room in the herbaceous border.

images need adding

Spring Feeding Paeonies - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/O-oBTR1H4Rw>

Collecting Tree Paeony Seeds In September - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/Rt0Y6UWNWxs>

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