



Herbaceous Peony Groups

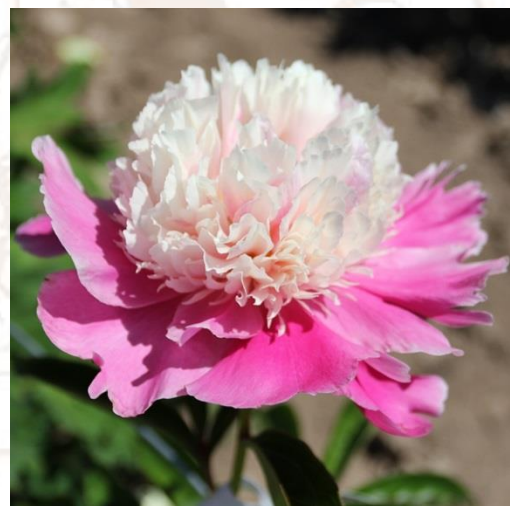
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There are several cultivar groups or types of peonies, based on their parental background, for gardeners to grow. Each cultivar group has specific characteristics that may affect their performance in your garden.

Lactiflora Group or the Common Garden Peony

By far the largest cultivar group is the common garden peony with several thousand named cultivated forms all derived from one species is *Paeonia lactiflora*. This group has been in cultivation for centuries in China and is found in adjacent parts of Northern Russia also. As a garden plant it grows best in well drained soils and prefers a location that receives full sunlight most of the day for best flowering performance.

Long lived, there are cultivars still grown that were introduced to commerce in England in 1805 such as the cultivar, *Fragrans*. No doubt there are traditional varieties grown in China that are older still where their culture reveres ancestral forms of flowers that would pre-date even this variety. Noted for a wide variety of flower forms the flower color range varies from white to pink, rosy red and on through to a deep maroon red. The garden peony grows to be a substantial size plant with some cultivars reaching 40" in height and an even wider spread once established. One key feature of this group is that each flowering stem may have multiple flower buds. The side buds often bloom after the primary bud has nearly finished blooming to provide a longer period of color in the garden.



P. lactiflora 'Cora Stubbs'

Many of the older cultivars of this group exhibit weak stems and require mechanical support in the garden especially when in full bloom. The American Peony Society has a program to recognize those peonies that do not require support during bloom and are strong growing and well adapted to the garden and these are designated with the Award of Landscape Merit (ALM). This group is noted for extreme winter hardiness since it grows natively in areas that have winter temperatures as low as -40 F.

Herbaceous Hybrid Group

This group is distinguished by being the result of crossing any of the 45 different recognized herbaceous peony species. They may have anywhere from 2 or more species involved in their genetic background. Depending on the species involved plant characteristics can vary greatly. Large leaves and early blooming characteristics are found in those hybrids involving *Paeonia daurica macrophylla*. Those involving *Paeonia tenuifolia*, the fern-leaf peony often have finely dissected leaves. Two examples are

Smouthi and Early Scout. Some other characteristics of the herbaceous hybrids may be more brilliant true red coloration of the blooms from the species *Paeonia peregrina*. Color patterns are more varied with examples like Athena which has raspberry colored splashes at the base of the cream colored petals making an attractive and decidedly different statement in the flower garden. Yellow colored hybrid peonies have been achieved with examples like Lemon Chiffon, Sunny Boy and Sunny Girl. A tendency for one flower bud per stem is also more prevalent in the hybrids. Flower forms vary from single to fully double although there appear to be more single and semi-double flowered forms in this group. Some examples of this group include bright reds, Alexander Woolcott, Red Charm, Red Red Rose, and Earlibird. One of the purest whites



Peony hybrid 'Early Scout'

is the hybrid Campagna. There is a nice range of opaque pinks like Lovely Rose, Janice, Etched Salmon and Friendship. Coral colored hybrid varieties include, Coral Charm, Coral Sunset and Coral N Gold. Dark red almost deep mahogany red hybrids include, Bob, Buckeye Belle and Chocolate Soldier. Because of some more heat tolerant peony species found in this group we have found some that while more tolerant of heat they may go dormant earlier in the growing season. In warmer growing regions this group often benefits from a location in the garden where it receives full sun in the morning and dappled afternoon sun. They also have been reported to be less tolerant than the lactiflora group of heavy, wet clay soils and suffer more winter damage where snow cover is not dependable.



Peony hybrid 'Etched Salmon'