



Peony Fragrance

Hazel Cook— Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

Peonies possess one of the best examples of the sweetness of smell or perfume that we refer to as fragrance.

Besides the appearance of large striking blooms in many colors and forms, it is the intoxicating fragrance of peonies that individuals remember from their youth and want to establish in their own gardens and fresh bouquets. While time may have exaggerated some of our memories, it is true that many peonies do not have the strength of fragrance possessed by the older *Lactiflora* varieties of Grandma's garden.

Fragrant double white and pink varieties derived from *Paeonia lactiflora* which bloom toward the end of the season are readily available and many of these are very fragrant. A few of our favorites include *Festiva Maxima*, *Louise Lossing*, *Moonstone*, *Mrs. Frank Beach*, *Myra Macrae*, *Myrtle Gentry*, *Nancy Nora*, *Phoebe Cary* and *White Frost*. These can be smelled for several feet in a garden and would be overpowering as a large bouquet in a small room. *Burma Ruby*, *Diana Parks*, *Flame*, *Henry Bockstoce*, *Mary Brand*, and *Postilion* are red and red-tone peonies that are quite fragrant.

Moderately fragrant peonies are those whose fragrance will be evident in the garden in the absence of a significant breeze and delightful in a large bouquet. These might include *Elsa Sass*, *Fairy's Petticoat*, *June Rose*, *Karl Rosenfield*, *Princess Margaret*, *Raspberry Sundae*, *Red Charm*, *The Fleece* and *Tophat*. There are more moderately fragrant than there are very fragrant peonies and a greater range of color and form in these varieties.



Many other peonies are lightly or slightly fragrant inviting you to get close to the bloom to really enjoy the sweet scent. There seems to be an endless list of these including *Dainty*, *Dandy Dan*, *Felix Supreme*, *Friendship*, *Gardenia*, *Henry Sass*, *Joyce*, *Legion of Honor*, *Longfellow*, *Marie Jacquin*, *Pride of Blasdell*, *Red Grace*, *Red Red Rose* and *Roselette*.

As with all senses, each individual perceives fragrance differently. Our sense of smell diminishes as we mature. Fragrance of a particular variety may also vary with temperature, humidity, time of day and even growing conditions, although these differences are generally fairly subtle. A very fragrant peony will have significant fragrance throughout the endurance of the bloom. Some hybrid peonies have scents that are generally considered unpleasant.



With careful selection it is possible to have fragrant peonies in your garden for several weeks of bloom. As mentioned earlier the very fragrant Lactiflora varieties tend to bloom late in the season. It is more challenging to find fragrance amongst very early blooming peonies but some are at least slightly fragrant including P. Tenuifolia, Hardy Giant, Laddie



'Early Scout'

and Early Scout. Extend the fragrant bloom period by including tree peonies such as Golden Era, Leda, Black Panther, Chinese Dragon and Marchioness as well as Intersectional Peonies such as Unique, Bartzella, Garden Treasure, Hillary, Prairie Charm, Callies' Memory, Julia Rose and Watermelon Wine. These not only add fragrance but a wider range of flower color, foliage and plant form. Many of the ALM (Award of Landscape Merit) peonies are fragrant in addition to providing excellent landscape plants including Coral Sunset, Burma Ruby, and Early Scout.

Whether for garden plants or cut flowers, fragrance is an important factor to consider in selecting a peony. Fragrance will be dispersed by a breeze so a sheltered location is best if you wish to benefit from the full effect of a fragrant peony. One intensely strong fragrant plant in the garden or bloom in a bouquet will perfume an area and give the impression of overall fragrance.

Since fragrance is so personal, gardeners are encouraged to visit public gardens, private growers, commercial planting and peony flower shows such as the APS Conventions in order to evaluate fragrance for themselves. There is nothing like the real thing when selecting peonies for such an important characteristic.

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