

Forming a Local or Regional Peony Society

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1) Find like-minded peony devotees in your area. Some groups have started with less than ten people.

- Talk to people in your book club, neighborhood, garden club, exercise group, church, place of employment and local horticultural programs.

2) Set a place and time for your first meeting.

- Decide on the name of your organization, elect officers and set dues. Encourage people to join during the first meeting, making them the “Charter Members”. You may need to set the dues at a higher level to develop “seed” funds. When you have more members and ways to raise funds, the dues could be lowered.

3) Business matters.

In the US you’ll need bylaws, an Employer Identification Number (even if you don’t have employees), Certificate of Incorporation, checking account and IRS Package 1023 (application form and instructions), if you want to operate as a nonprofit. Merely stating that the group is nonprofit or not-for-profit won’t achieve the same results. (Don’t lead donors to think that their donations are tax-deductible, unless you are positive of your status.) In most situations you can also apply for a certificate from your state to be exempt from collecting and paying sales tax. You’ll need this (in most states) when you have plant sales and other fund-raising activities.

- Once you’re established, paperwork is not a one-time thing. Some fees, reports and returns are required annually.
- This may seem too complicated for those of us who would like things “sweet and simple”, but it’s really not that difficult and the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks.
- There’s no need to “muddle through”—maybe you have an accountant, attorney or experienced businessperson within your group that can help. There is a lot of information available on the Internet or contact APS—we’ll do our best to help.

4) You will need a budget and a list of educational and service projects.

- Some ideas for educational and service projects could include: establish a display garden, public tours and seminars, slide shows for garden clubs.

5) Plant sales are a good source of income and a way to finance your educational projects.

- If you’re not ready for a sale, try an exchange or root swap.

6) Promote and grow your organization.

Work within your “Charter Members” to get the word out. Places that can help you get the word out. Post fliers at the grocery store, garden centers and workplace bulletin boards; buy a small ad in local “shopper-type” newspapers; send a letter to all APS members in your area.

- Make every effort to promote your group in a professional way. Use “spell check” and publishing software for written communication. Develop a membership brochure.
- Use nametags, door prizes and “mixer” activities, such as coffee and dessert, to encourage interaction at your meetings.

7) Keep your organization active.

- Stay in touch with your members via newsletters, e-mail broadcasts, postcards for coming events, website.

8) Now that you’re established, some advice from those who have been through it.

- Be open and welcoming to new members and new ideas.
- Delegate—don’t make it look so difficult or complicated that no one wants to take over.
- Stick to your bylaws.

This article is a guideline to help you get started. If you need further assistance contact contact@americanpeonysociety.org. Good luck!

