

Donald R. Smith

Fairfield, CT 06824, USA

Peony Breeder: specializing in the breeding of intersectional (Itoh) peonies

**Brief Bio:** Don Smith is one of a tiny handful of breeders worldwide who are actively breeding intersectional hybrid peonies. Motivated and inspired by the landmark achievement of Japanese nurseryman, Toichi Itoh and the later successes of Roger Anderson and Don Hollingsworth, Don began “playing” around with the intersectional cross in the early 1990’s as a hobby and soon became hooked. In 1995, he took over publication of the peony hybridizers newsletter, *Pæonia*, and began writing and reporting about intersectional crosses and hybrids. After 25+ years of breeding intersectional peonies, there are now more than 500 intersectional seedlings from Don’s breeding efforts. The first of these began blooming in the spring of 2000. To date, twenty-nine (29) have already been named and registered with the APS. His successes include the unique reverse-cross intersectional hybrid *Reverse Magic* and the remarkable *Impossible Dream*, the only known hybrid between the herbaceous peony *lactiflora* and the tree peony *suffruticosa*. Some of Don’s best known cultivars are *Pink Double Dandy*, *Scrum-didley-umptious*, *Singing in the Rain* and *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, just to name a few. Don’s latest release is a double cream colored beauty with large, dark plum flares and dark maroon speckles, named *All That Jazz*. Nearly all of his named varieties have a delicate, but sweet fragrance, which some have described as lemon-like.

In 2003, Don retired after working more than 37 years as a Research Physicist for the Air Force Research Laboratory in Bedford, MA where he directed several major space experiments focused on measuring infrared emissions from the earth’s upper atmosphere, such as those from the Aurora Borealis. One of these experiments (CIRRIS-1A), which was flown on the Space Shuttle (STS-39) in 1991, resulted in over 40 published papers including several significant discoveries of non-thermal emissions never previously observed in the earth’s atmosphere. Since his retirement in 2003, Don has devoted the bulk of his time to the task of trying to create new and improved intersectional hybrids. He currently maintains several outstanding educational websites devoted to intersectional peonies and is widely regarded as one of the world’s leading experts on intersectional hybrid peonies.

In recent years, Don served as a member of the American Peony Society (APS) Board of Directors and authored a column in the APS Bulletin (2004-2006) on intersectional peonies entitled “An Intersectional Point of View”. He has also been invited to talk on intersectional peonies at various local gardening groups and clubs as well as at regional, national and international peony society meetings, including talks in US (2014, 2016), Germany (2005), China (2013) and Denmark (2015). At the 2011 annual meeting of the APS, Don was awarded the highly coveted Saunderson’s Memorial Medal, an award named in honor of Professor A.P. Saunderson (1869-1953), America’s most successful and respected peony breeder. This award was first established in 1968 and was last awarded in 2003.

His most recent hybridizing goals are focused on producing high-quality intersectional hybrid peonies in a wider range of colors and color combinations, but especially new varieties with

double flowers in various shades of red, purple and dark pink, which are currently rare in the intersectional group. Another major focus is trying to break-through the extremely high level of sterility that exists in this group of hybrids by creating a few F2 or Backcross hybrids, so that we can begin the long process of trying to slowly increase the fertility of the intersectional group that will eventually lead to fully fertile advanced generation hybrids that will be self-sustaining.

## Other facts and information about Donald Smith

Born: Hackensack, New Jersey (USA) October 30, 1942

Current age: 78

Married with two children, Wife (Amy) and children - Zachary and Haleigh, ages 35 and 32

Graduated from Fairleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, NJ (USA) in 1964 (BS in Physics) and 1966 (MS in Physics)

Employed 37+ years as a Research Physicist for the Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) Bedford, Massachusetts (USA)

Program Manager and scientific director of the first (non-NASA) scientific experiment to fly on the US Space Shuttle (STS-4, June 27-July 4, 1983) and later also (STS-39, April 29 – May 1, 1991)

Author of numerous scientific journal articles in the field of infrared and atmospheric physics

Retired: Sept. 2003

Currently living in Fairfield, Connecticut (Don, Amy and their dog, Tuukka)

Lifetime member of the American Peony Society

Recent awards and publications:

The 15<sup>th</sup> recipient of the A. P. Saunders Memorial Medal from the American Peony Society (APS), 2011 for outstanding achievements in peony hybridizing

“Peony of the Year” for 2014 awarded by the Canadian Peony Society to *Singing in the Rain*

Co-author of the paper **Microsatellite Marker Development in Peony using Next-generation Sequencing**, B. Gilmore et al., J. AMER. SOC. HORT. SCI. 138(1):1–11. 2013.

Life-long runner, having finished more than 27 marathons including several ultra-marathons of up to 50 miles (80 kilometers). Has run more than 70, 000 miles (~110,000 kilometers) since beginning to run track and cross country in high school (in 1959), but in recent years is now logging miles by biking.

Other recent activities include: enjoying my 2 beautiful granddaughters (ages, 3 and 1 ½ yrs)