

The AMERICAN PEONY SOCIETY Bulletin

Spring 2023; No. 405



Photo: APS Gold Medal Winner 'Gay Paree'

Winsome Winners

THE AMERICAN PEONY SOCIETY

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The American Peony Society Bulletin®



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President's Message Spring 2023

Nate Bremer, APS President and Director – Reedsville, Wisconsin

The peony world is running “hot” during this usually slow period of the year! APS leadership has been extremely busy working on memberships, winter education meetings, planning conventions, website updates, publishing needs and countless other initiatives. Members are busy looking at new cultivars to grace their gardens, partaking in webinars and social media, planning for events and delving deeper into the bottomless pit we call the “peony world.”



Personally, I've spent most of my winter days in front of a computer addressing numerous initiatives, but I've also found time to converse with other peony enthusiasts. Many conversations involve APS initiatives, but also lead to views on plants, hybridizing, history, and the coming bloom period – drawing us all into the enjoyable “bottomless peony pit.” The number of side topics stemming from any category is endless.

Some of my favorites include cats watching our APS educational Zoom meetings; new and better ways to propagate woody peonies; past hybridizers/growers and why they had difficulties with certain plants, just as we do today; historical peony personalities and how they shaped the peony world we experience today; and the list goes on and on.

Many new friends have been made as well. These connections are important on a personal level, but also often lead to new ideas and involvement in our Society.

Of these friendships, many are with much younger people, who will be able to enjoy peonies for many more years than I can. Youth brings on many new perspectives and I can only believe these members keep me young(er) at heart, but also benefit the Society by keeping it relevant in a quickly changing world.

Obviously, this new generation of peony fanatics have electronic device skills and knowledge that I can only dream of having. These involve pro-

gramming, social media presence, application use and a variety of other computer related skills – extremely important to APS’ mission of supplying education and promoting the peony in our modern era. Much of their excellent work may go unnoticed, but is evident in greater functionality, access and broader exposure of the peony through electronic media.

Many folks my age and older benefit, but they also play an important role in our Society. Through mentorship, education, experience, and goodwill, they welcome newcomers and supply them with a solid working foundation. Experience is of key importance and can only come from years spent with peonies and related activities. This experience is gratefully accepted and sought after by our new and younger members. A huge thank you goes to these very important established members and the groundwork they supply for a new generation of peony aficionados!

All the Best,
Nate Bremer

Transitions

Thank You to Kris Jurik, APS Treasurer

As Kris Jurik’s time as Treasurer for the American Peony Society draws to a close, we want to express our sincere gratitude for her many years of volunteer service. The role of treasurer and financial steward requires integrity, accuracy and responsiveness to our members and suppliers. Kris took on these duties with dedication and diligence.

In the last months, Kris has worked to transition APS accounts, daily activities and oversight to our new Treasurer, Lynn Gessling. We are fortunate that Kris plans to remain a board member and continue to share her passion for peonies, her knowledge, and her experience in many facets of APS leadership.



Bulletin Board

1) **New APS Mailing Address.**

To better serve our members using mail APS has acquired a new mailbox. Please use this address for written correspondence.

American Peony Society
P.O. Box 572
Dickson, TN 37056

- 2) **2023 Syracuse, New York Convention.** Join APS for our Annual Convention in beautiful upstate New York. The convention includes many opportunities including Garden Tours, Educational Seminars, Annual Banquet, Auction, Flower Show and Exhibition and Business Meeting. To register and find out more visit: <https://americanpeonysociety.org/news-events/annual-convention/2023-convention/>.

- 3) **Seed Program.** The 2023 seed distribution list is being developed and will be available online in March. U.S. and Canada orders will be able to purchase seeds for direct mailing to their destinations.

Overseas seed shipments require a USDA issued phytosanitary certificate – APS does not provide this service. Overseas members wishing to purchase seeds must privately arrange for shipment through a commercial organization who will provide a certificate, prior to ordering seeds. Please contact the Seed Chair to make your international orders at: seeds@americanpeonysociety.org.

- 4) **Spring Live Auction.** This auction is available to members attending the annual convention and provides much needed funding, which supports the many APS initiatives, publications and website. Peonies and related items are welcome from any member, no donation is too small. Sharing your love of peonies through a plant division donation helps accomplish our mission – plus allows one to experience the joy of dividing a peony! Most peony donations are made for fall shipping from the donor to the winning bidder. Further information and promise of donation may be made through the Member Portal at: <https://>

americanpeonysociety.org/member-portal/pages/donate-contribute/submit-auction-plants/

- 5) **Volunteer!** APS has seen an uptick in volunteerism in many areas. New member involvement is important to the health and energy of our Society, but also provides new opportunities for those volunteering. Thanks to all new volunteers and we know your help will keep APS moving forward! If you are intending to attend the 2023 Convention in New York, we welcome your assistance and hope you'll join in the fun of participation. Contact: membership@americanpeonysociety.org to get signed up!
- 6) **Article Submission.** The APS Editorial Group welcomes articles and photos from our members! You don't have to be a polished writer. Content can be anything from favorite peonies to a garden profile to your experiences growing peonies in your region – basically anything peonies. The Editorial Group will work with you for the best results. Your story will benefit the peony world. Articles may be submitted online at: <https://americanpeonysociety.org/member-portal/pages/contribute/submit-articles/> or by emailing Kimberly Bremer at: editor@americanpeonysociety.org.
- 7) **Editorial Group.** APS' Bulletin is a benefit our members look forward to each quarter and our editorial group is looking for more members to become involved. If you enjoy writing, proofing, working with images, or have a special interest in a specific area, please contact the Editor at: editor@americanpeonysociety.org. Your participation is welcome!
- 8) **Images for Peony Registry.** There are still many peonies which do not yet have representative images, and these are noted by the icon left. APS welcomes submissions of missing peony cultivar images which may be uploaded at: <https://americanpeonysociety.org/member-portal/pages/contribute/submit-photos/>.



Tales from the Peony Fields

A few years ago, I was present for an a-ha moment: the “re-discovery” of **'Gay Paree'** and her ascent to the 2023 Gold Medal. It's a peony tale with a moral.

Here's how it happened.

It was a beautiful June day, and I was in the garden trailing behind a group of passionate peony fanatics. The peonies, frankly, were showing off, and the company was debating the merits of Gold Medal nominees. “Not consistent.” “Not readily available.” “Bad foliage.” The opining continued, row after row. There were the new, the buzz-worthy, the wowsa's and the exhibition winners.

Suddenly there she was, as she had been June after June. Familiar, reliable, bursting with frilly flowers, healthy. Gay as her name, nodding in a graceful pink row, brightening the landscape.

Someone in the group stopped, looked closely, then looked again. A turn to wonder. “You know, why haven't we ever considered **'Gay Paree?'** It's an exceptional peony, even if it IS an older cultivar.”

Silence.

Then the conversation took on a happy buzz. **'Gay Paree'** was named by each peony lover for who she was. An elegant flower, a profuse bloomer, a fuss-free favorite with lovely foliage, a long-time performer in many gardens. In that moment, everyone was surprised and delighted at this unexpected opportunity to nominate a peony so deserving.

Even more satisfying, the awards committee agreed: this classic beauty – first registered 90 years ago – not only has stood the test of time but is worthy of the APS's top award. We affirmed that the deserving can be right under our noses, even a peony sold for less than \$30 in most catalogs.

Fast-forward to the Michigan Convention. There, a new peony lover was bidding at her first live auction. The fancy hundred-dollar cultivars and hybridizers' latest introductions were out of reach. But on the screen came **'Gay Paree'** – and for a modest bid (sparked by an inside scoop), the member secured a true winner, one we are sure will grow well, dazzle in the garden, and delight for years.

Right then - as a society - we accomplished something good.

The story ends with an invitation. In gardening and life, stop. Look with fresh eyes. An unsung prize may be waiting.



Correction

In the Q4 Winter Bulletin the article “*Paeonia jishanensis* – Unusual in Every Way” appeared with editing errors which were in no part due to the author’s content submission.

- 1) Introductory paragraph: The first sentence should read: Of all the wild tree peony species ~~peonies from the Moutan region~~ found within the Section Moutan, *Paeonia jishanensis* is one of the most unusual.
- 2) Habitat and Distribution: The first sentence should read *Paeonia jishanensis* is clearly a ~~hybrid~~ hybrid species.
- 3) Unusual Sepals: Last sentence first paragraph should read What is so unusual about the way this ~~cultivar~~ species protects its bloom?

Adversity Peony Planting

Gene Froc - Lumsden, Saskatchewan, Canada

What do you do when you expect late shipments of peony roots in cold weather regions?

It happened to us in Zone 3a-3b this year (2022). Preparing well beforehand is the most important step that we take. It makes planting much easier and quicker when the peony roots finally arrive.

Summer Preparation

The planting procedure we use, regardless of when we expect to re-

ceive roots, is to make sure all peony planting holes are pre-dug and prepared during the summer. The pre-dug holes are approximately 24 inches in diameter by 24 inches deep. They are dug using a hydraulically driven power auger mounted on the front bucket of a tractor. Our natural soils consist of very stiff to hard glacial clay till. As such, they are not suitable for growing peonies. So, the native soils must be dug out and hauled away to a suitable disposal location.



Holes for future peony plants are pre-dug using a power auger. Hard glacial soils must be removed.



A tractor is used for digging and backfilling, a back-saving necessity.

For many peony growers, this mechanical digging method is not an option. However, my bad back simply does not allow me to dig by hand anymore. The use of tractors for planting and backfilling makes peony growing possible.

After we dig the holes, they are backfilled to slightly above ground surface with a loose to slightly compact topsoil with a well-aged manure mixture. Then, a plastic nursery pot with the bottom cut out is pushed centrally into the hole to a depth of about **1 to 2 inches below** the topsoil surface (much of the pot protrudes above the soil). The pots serve as hole markers,



Prepared holes are covered with a geotextile.



Holes are cut in the geotextiles around the pot edges.

planting spaces, barriers to mulch and water reservoirs for summer watering. It should be noted our region is semi-arid and water conservation, with the assistance of the pot structure, is helpful in the establishment of new plantings. Protruding pot rims also mark the hole locations for geotextile placement. The entire area is then covered with a robust geotextile.

Holes are cut through the geotextile using a sharp (e.g. drywall) knife, proceeding around the underlying pot edges, allowing the geotextile to now settle around the pots to the ground surface.



The geotextile is covered with mulch.



The pots create a backstop for the mulch in the geotextile.



Pots are filled with water to consolidate the soil prior to planting.

Mulch is then placed over the geotextile. Pots previously placed within the holes, and rising above the geotextile, serve as a backstop so that mulch does not cover the area inside where peonies are to be planted. The pots are filled with water. This helps pre-consolidate the soil before planting.

Fall Planting

When the time for planting arrives, the pots are removed, set to the side, and then the mulch is pulled back with a shovel to allow re-digging of the holes by hand. The peony holes are re-dug to the appropriate width and correct depth to make way for the peony root size and type of peony. The topsoil mix



The entire planting area is covered with insulated tarps.

taken out is placed inside 5-gallon pails for later use in backfilling (typically one and one half, 5-gallon pails are required per hole.)

Peonies are then placed more-or-less centrally inside the hole to the appropriate planting depth, the root can be set at a slight angle, if necessary, held in place and then backfilled in 6 inch +/- thick layers using the topsoil from the pails, up to about 2 inches below the exterior ground surface. Each layer is lightly tamped only. The pot is then placed centrally or as-required and additional soil placed both inside and outside the pot so that it extends to about 1 inch above the exterior ground surface (alternatively, the pots can be pushed into the soil to a depth of 2 inches after backfilling is completed.)

It is to be noted that some soil settling is to be expected in the future, and that is why the topsoil should be mounded a bit after planting. The mulch previously removed is shoveled back against the pots.

The pots are filled with water to help remove air voids around the roots and to help further consolidate the soil before the fibrous roots begin to grow.



Despite the snow, the soil beneath the insulated tarps with mulch was not frozen.



The soil with no mulch under the tarps was frozen but manageable for planting.

When our peonies arrive on time before freeze up, we simply plant them as noted above and all is well. However, we do take extra steps to protect new tree peony plantings, we fill the pots above the soil line with mulch (further insulation value), which is removed each spring so the surface does not become waterlogged.

One of the most important steps we take to facilitate planting of

expected late arrival peonies is to cover the entire area with insulated construction tarps beforehand. From a thermal point of view, the size of the covered area is as important as the insulation thickness, so we use the largest tarp sizes available.

Dealing with Late Fall Arrivals

Well after the insulated tarps were placed this fall, some peony roots arrived during mid-November after

temperatures had already plummeted to -10°C to -20°C (14°F to -4°F), followed by 6 to 8 inches of snowfall.

Once we shoveled off the snow and removed the tarps, we found that the soil beneath the insulated tarps (with mulch below) was not frozen! On the other hand, the soil with no mulch beneath the tarps was frozen to a depth of 1 to 2 inches which was still manageable for planting. The soil outside the tarped areas was frozen to a depth of about 8 inches, which would have made planting impossible.

The advantage of using insulated construction tarps for reducing soil freezing was very much appreciated when it came to late fall

planting. Surprisingly, the additional insulation contributed by the underlying mulch was obvious in one planting area.

We replace the insulated tarps after planting. I expect that the additional benefits of keeping the tarps in place will be as follows:

- Additional time for fine root growth to occur in place before deep soil freezing.
- Reduced potential for frost heave of new roots.
- Additional cold weather protection and resistance to freeze – thaw cycles in the spring. This is a bonus for young tree peonies.



Insulated tarps protect new peony plantings against extreme cold, snow, freeze-thaw-cycles and wind desiccation in the northern Canadian plains.

- Protection against combined wet and cold soil conditions during the early spring (by shedding snow meltwater away from the planting area). Note: Protruding pot rims must be covered with tarps in areas which receive winter rains or wet precipitation, as the pots collect and hold water at the surface, which may be detrimental to peony survival.

We also rely on insulated tarps to provide additional protection against extreme cold, wind desiccation and spring freeze-thaw cy-

cles for our mature tree peonies, which was the subject of a previous 2020 APS bulletin article.

The Next Chapter

At the time this article was submitted to the Bulletin in December of 2022, we still had not received our last peony order from overseas. The ground will be fully frozen by the time they arrive even with the insulated tarps, and so we will be forced to use an experimental storage method for the roots over the winter. But perhaps that is a topic for another article. 🌸



Cat-ptivating Presentations!

The APS's 2023 series of winter webinars are proving wildly popular. Held the first Saturday of the month from January through April, the seminars are a new benefit to APS members.

Here, Pepper the cat takes in Lois Girton's presentation on Saunders peonies. While Pepper did not officially register for the webinar, Lois graciously allowed her to audit.

Cultivar Registration Trends

Jordan Kabat, ICRA Registrar - Manitowoc, Wisconsin

At the time of this *Bulletin's* circulation, most members of the American Peony Society will have acquainted themselves with the **2022 *Directory of New Cultivars*** recently distributed via post and published online in the member portal of the APS website. On its own, the inflated size of that publication is a clear indication of rising popularity in both the development and registration of unique cultivars within the genus *Paeonia*. One may recall just a few years ago when newly-named cultivars were routinely published alongside images and descriptions exclusively in the *Bulletin* amid content such as this very article.

Today, however, out of necessity we have not only moved to a publication wholly dedicated to such registration announcements external to the *Bulletin*, but now on to an even larger format in an effort accommodate the enormous volume of submissions. The trend, punctuated by this tome of a *Directory*, has naturally elicited conversation and recurring questions amid members of the community. As the newly appointed Registrar for the Society, I feel it is my duty to offer some degree of clarity regarding these issues, and to provide a foundation for further enlightened discussion.

Amid the dizzying flurry of new introductions, I have found myself met with an inversely proportional number of questions from individuals in the peony community:

“To what end are so many cultivars being registered?”

“Why not simply publish the list virtually, rather than distribute a printed publication?”

And likely the most pervasive of inquiries:

“Does the APS have a right to qualify and refuse cultivars submitted for registration on the basis of such judgement, or is there some way to ensure the quality of cultivars being submitted for registration is of a high degree?”

Before addressing these questions, we must first understand cultivar registration - what the process entails, what it ultimately

means, and thereby what purpose it serves. This at once all sounds rather complicated, but many will be surprised at how efficiently it is addressed. The foundation is this: to avoid confusion. That is all.

Registration is not meant to be a marketing tool. It is not a showcase of one's prowess at plant breeding. It is not done to create an historic catalogue, and it is certainly not an assessment of value. Some of these items are beneficial byproducts of the *process*, but they are *not* the purpose. Where confusion regarding purpose exists, these questions arise. Some in the community may take issue with such assertions, however, these objections matter little. What we are left with is a procedure chiefly concerned with nomenclature and that alone.

The American Peony Society and its Registrar are the named International Cultivar Registration Authority (ICRA) by the International Society of Horticultural Science (ISHS). Those fancy acronyms mean the APS and by extension the appointed Registrar are charged with ensuring submitted names for peony cultivars adhere to a lengthy volume of rules referred to as the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants*¹ ... more acronyms. As of this writing, the Code in some form dates back nearly two centuries to a suggested set of criteria proposed by Alphonse de Candolle to the International Horticultural Congress of

Brussels in 1846 for the naming of "garden forms" (cultivated varieties) - Thereby reserving Latin monikers for species and varieties found in the wild.

The current iteration of the *Code* has seen many revisions, the latest being in 2016. Currently, it encompasses two hundred and ten pages and is in its Ninth Edition. Quite a volume whose sole purpose is the dispel confusion. To avoid ambiguity and "cover all the bases" so-to-speak, it would seem, however, that gross specificity is completely necessary. The *Code* addresses all manner of issues and circumstances, and seeks to provide a baseline whereby plant cultivars originating anywhere on earth can be named and ostensibly identified without question of duplication.

The registration procedures that are in place for *Paeonia* cultivars have, like the *Code*, gone through a number of changes since the Society was first appointed the registration authority for the genus by the ISHS in 1974. Today, the process is more rigorous than it has ever been, and rightly so with the introduction of so many new cultivars annually. Detailed information regarding a cultivar's physical characteristics, habit, parentage, etc. is requested in an effort to aid in its positive identification when considered against other similar cultivars.

¹ *The ICNCP will be referred to as the *Code* for the remainder of this article.

Though all of the information requested in this process is certainly useful, many will be surprised to know that none of it is actually required by the ISHS, or the *Code*. These entities are solely concerned with names, the format of those names, and the forbiddance of name duplication. Today's most recent edition of the Code does not even require that a cultivar have been propagated to be registered. It is as a Society that we concern ourselves with such details because we like to keep track of these plants once they take on a name. These requirements have been made by the APS, but done so with our best interests in mind.

Nearly all registration submissions that cross my desk will be approved provided the cultivar in question is proven to exist and the requested name adheres to the Code. Over the last year wading through submissions, the only occasions where refusal occurred was based on the proposed name, and were thereafter approved with some alteration. Duplication via homonymous moniker is a common offense that many registrants do not consider (ex. "Bee Loved" sounds the same as 'Beloved' (already a registered peony) and is thereby not allowed as it may create confusion when used in conversation).

Even with the various requirements in place, though, the Society and by extension the Registrar do not have the right to refuse outright a submission based on plant charac-

teristics. If the absence of information would make it ambiguous to a point where the existence of the plant is negligible (such as the lack of a photograph), it is within our right to request more information before review and approval, but to make any other kind of assessment would be strictly out of bounds.

Thus, we return to our series of questions. To what end are so many cultivars being registered? The simple answer is that some breeders are interested in distributing large numbers of their unique cultivars. If distribution were not the goal, registration would be wasted effort.

The writing on the wall that nobody wants to read aloud (though it is an unintended byproduct) is that registration is a great marketing tool. If the end goal of distribution is a financial one, you have a captive and interested audience receiving the printed publication containing those newly-named cultivars.

To curb the use of registration as a marketing tool, we come to the second question: why not cease distribution of a publication containing these new registrations to members and publish exclusively in a digital format, or perhaps add them to the Registry periodically and without notice? In relinquishing the dissemination of a printed directory, many would argue that the Society would save on printing and postage costs, and the pub-

lication of new cultivars would perhaps draw less attention.

This certainly makes quite a bit of sense...however, the ISHS and the *Code* require the *printed publicized notice* of all newly approved cultivar names. This was formerly and conveniently published in the *Bulletin*, already in regular circulation, though to accommodate photographs and extended descriptions - of now hundreds of cultivars annually - we have moved on to a veritable catalogue of the very latest. I might suggest (much to the chagrin of you who love to peruse the photographs) that we return to publicizing new introductions in the *Bulletin*, though merely as a prosaic list of cultivar names and their respective breeders.

This leads us to the most controversial of issues - the question of *should* a given cultivar have been registered in the first place? As stated earlier, the Society and by extension the Registrar cannot make any kind of quality assessment of cultivars, and certainly cannot refuse to register cultivars based on any such assessment. Recall that the purpose of registration is *only* to prevent nomenclatural ambiguity. If the intention of a breeder or selector is to disseminate a particular cultivar, it must be argued that said



cultivar deserves a name, if only to avoid confusion with any other in commercial or casual trade.

The prevailing opinion today seems to be that the merit of a moniker is directly equitable to commercial value. Commercial value, in turn, is equitable to worthy or desirable inclusion in a garden landscape. Opinions on this matter, however, vary greatly. The preferences of gardeners can be drastically divergent between individuals, regions, and even eras.

Consider for a moment that some hybrids registered by Saunders do not possess much merit on their own when measured against oth-

er registered cultivars - even those registered contemporaneously, let alone those being registered today. Some are not even easily distinguished from one another, yet their merits may be judged in commerce now because they are valuable to individuals who collect Saunders hybrids. They are valuable because of their ties to a breeder and not much more. Who is to say that a similar situation may not arise in the future?

It would seem that human beings are innately and perennially collectors of useless artifacts from our past... plants included. Perhaps for the moment the best we can hope for is that the rigors of description called for in the registration process will aid us as our Registry continues to expand and it becomes increasingly difficult to discern the differences between individual cultivars. Photographs are an exceptional aid, as is attentiveness to even the most minute details of physical structures.

And still there are some with anxiety regarding an impending drought of "good names", though, unless great desire exists for more variations on "raspberry ____", rest assured there are plenty of options that have yet to be thought up.

Finally, *deserve* is a dangerous word. Such a statement, though, may be offensive to the breeders whose goals are to advance and improve the hybrid peony and who make quality assessments every season. They toss seedlings onto

the compost heap because those seedlings "don't deserve" to be registered, or they "don't deserve" to contribute their inferior genetics to future offspring. Certainly, I cannot argue against this practice, as I partake in it myself. I will assert, though, that my affinity for single peonies may not align with the tastes of many other breeders or the average home gardener. A plant that I believe "deserves" to live on in my garden may be cast aside by many others.

To say that a cultivar deserves to be registered implies that it deserves to be distributed. Consider, however, that although the reason for distribution may most commonly be a commercial one, there may be many other reasons to distribute a cultivar and thereby just as many reasons to grant it an official name.

If you find yourself concerned that the number of new introductions in recent years is too great and it will be impossible to "collect them all", or that it has become too difficult to discern what new cultivars will be the best for your home garden, please recall that registration is not a quality assessment. Grow what looks appealing to you, what comes recommended from trusted sources, or cultivars developed by breeders in similar climates to your own.

As time passes, surely the truly superior cultivars will linger and those others will fall away into obscurity. 🌹

The Language of Peonies

Cotyledon

/,kädə'lēd(ə)n/

From Greek kotulēdōn, and latin meaning “cup shaped cavity”, or “seed leaf” in plants.

Most peonies exhibit the trait in which the cotyledon remains enveloped within the seed coat. Thus, **no** above ground seed leaves are ever produced and the cotyledons remain wrapped in the seed coat.

Few peonies produce visible (above ground) seed leaves. Those that do, may be identified by a pair of rounded strap-like juvenile leaves, which do not resemble adult leaves. *P. tenuifolia*, *P. rockii* and *P. brownii* are peony species which typically convert their cotyledons to seed leaves. Some hybrids with these species in their ancestry will also produce seed leaves from their cotyledons.

What do cotyledons do?

Cotyledons serve as a nutrient reserve and/or a photosynthetic structure in the first year of a peony seedling's life.

For further information about cotyledons search “epigeal” and “hypogeal” germination. There is much interesting information about these two forms of germination and it can lead one down a new path of interest when growing peonies from seed!



A Peony Breeding Project

Based on Saunders and Species

Peter Waltz - Exeter, New Hampshire

The first step took place in 1984 when I joined the American Peony Society. Back then, all new members were sent a copy of *The Peonies* edited by John Wister. In this book, one name kept appearing – that of A. P. Saunders. Part of chapter 2 was written by his daughter Silvia Saunders – an account I found immensely interesting. From that simple beginning a breeding project arose that continues to this day.

It is hard to remember the exact chronology of events and people, but all the following did occur and were contributing factors. Here is a list without any expansion. I contacted the seed distribution person in December 1984 – Chris Laning – and he sent me a box of peony seeds, probably about 500. I contacted Don Hollingsworth and bought a small collection of breeder plants, many of which I still have today. I collected named varieties from Wild, Hollingsworth, Smirnow, Adelman, A&D Peonies, Klehm, and New Peony Farm. I went to a peony convention and met Don Hollingsworth and Chris Laning; one of these two gave me old-tech-copies of two Saunders "Big Notebooks I and III" – one with all *Paeonia lactiflora* crosses, and

one with all the crosses that did not include *P. lactiflora*. (ed. note: scans of Don Hollingsworth's copies are available in the Member Portal of the APS website; the original are in the archives at Hamilton College and will be shown at the APS 2023 convention.)

Other people I met at peony conventions include Bill Seidl, Carol Adelman, Al Rogers, Kent Crossley, Scott Reath, Don Smith, Roger Anderson, and Roy Klehm. More than once we drove to Kalamazoo, MI to meet with Chris Laning who was very generous with divisions of his seedlings. Several trips were made to Maryville, MO to meet with Don Hollingsworth who has been a wonderful mentor and source of many plants (and pollen). More recently I have been exchanging pollen in the mail with Henry Chotkowski, Cory Tischman, and Tim Stanek.

Other trips included visiting Galen Burrell in Washington, Al Rogers in Oregon, Don Smetana in Washington, and Anne Oveson in Oregon. I looked for sources of peony species seed and found very few. Somehow, I learned of Galen Burrell and bought any number of species and species

crosses from him. Galen suggested Will McLewin in England and the Scottish Rock Garden Club as sources of species peony seed. Additionally, species peony seed can be found in the seed list of the Alpine Garden Society (UK), and the North American Rock Garden Society.

The fascination with Saunders is singularly deep. I contacted the archivist at Hamilton College and arranged to see “the Saunders papers”; not knowing what I would find. The first trip was exploratory, and some copies were made but time was a limiting factor. The next trip was planned to allow for much more copying. The database I use is Microsoft Access, and a quantity of Saunders information is now in Access files, but as in many things, having learned more in the interim, the format of the list now needs to be revised. Nevertheless, the Saunders information is still the starting guide of the project here.

An important feature of my breeding project is the use of species plants. Again, Saunders is the inspirational starting point. But anyone who has ever tried to identify every peony species on sight will find it is not easy. Certain species are so distinct that you might be able to do that, for example, *P. tenuifolia*, *P. daurica*, *P. anomala*, *P. emodi*, *P. mairei*, *P. peregrina*, *P. obovata*, and *P. delavayi*. Others are not so

distinct, especially *P. officinalis* (with its multiple subspecies). The mistaken use of the word “*officinalis*”, which implies the true (wild form) species, as one parent in many hybrids is unfortunate and widespread. Even Saunders wrote on this subject,

“I have no plant of the wild officinalis that I can be sure is true. All the species that I have used, and they are many, are the garden varieties, with the exception of one; this is a single of my own raising”.

(A P Saunders, Bulletin No 84, Sept 1941, reprinted in The Best of 75 Years, page 97)

One way of learning about hybrid outcome is to repeat a cross that Saunders made and observe the result. It is a somewhat imperfect way to see if your specimen of Species X might align with his. I have done this in several different combinations and continue to do so.

So, you might ask, “What is the best illustrated book on the subject?” For a long time I used *The Genus Paeonia* by Stern. However, when *Peonies of the World (Volumes 1, 2, and 3)* by Hong de Yuan were published, the former book was retired from active duty. The present article is not intended as a book review, but by weight of its thorough visiting of herbaria, and travel to the native locations of every species plant, *Peonies of the*

World is (in my opinion) now the best. I would have opted for more and larger photos to help with ID, but even with more photos of species phenotypes, when a plant is grown outside its native habitat one still must be careful when deciding to what species a subject plant belongs. The Greek god Proteus was able to change shape at will. Like Proteus, immature or imperfectly grown peony plants can be protean, resembling something else. Therefore, it is imperative to grow plants to a large, adult, and healthy condition before making an ID.

In order to establish credibility, the following is a short overview of Saunders and species plants used in the program. The present number of Saunders introductions is about 80; that number was well over 100 at one point. But in a large one-man project such as this, many of those named plants seemed to be somehow lacking in long-term vigor, or not well-adapted to encounters with imperfect culture or occasional harsh winters without snow cover. Species seed from trusted sources, further compared to reliable references, is an imperfect but practical compromise if you cannot do your own wild collecting. My blooming species collection includes herbaceous members *P. tenuifolia*, *P. anomala* (4 distinct forms), *P. emodj*, *P. daurica* (8 distinct forms), *P. wittmanniana*

(2 forms, of which one is, I believe, true *P. macrophylla*), *P. peregrina*, *P. mairei*, *P. officinalis* (about 12 forms), *P. lactiflora* (6 different individuals from wild-collected seed), *P. obovata* (diploid and tetraploid), *P. corsica*, and *P. mascula* (5 forms); plus woody species *P. delavayi* (8 different individuals), *P. rockii*, *P. ostii*, and *P. qiui*. Younger, non-blooming plants are maturing such as *P. arietina*, *P. broteri*, and *P. russii*. Other species are represented as pollen-donors, either collected in the wild, from plants no longer living, or pollen received in the mail; these include the US natives *P. californica* and *P. brownii*; plus *P. rhodia*, *P. kavachensis*, *P. turcica*, *P. arietina*, *P. ludlowii*, *P. cambessedesii*, *P. clusii*, *P. coriacea*, *P. intermedia*, and *P. parnassica*. Add to these, the mixed “non-species”: *P. mollis*, *P. bakeri*, Itohs, lutea hybrids, Suffruticosa Group, and Gansu Mudans. You may notice that I am a big fan of *Paeonia* species plants. These are all single flowered plants, but they make seed and pollen once they are older, and large enough. A particular subset of hybrids here consists of combinations of 2 or more different species (excluding *P. lactiflora*, because of its observed dominance in resulting form). Eventually *P. lactiflora* or part-*lactiflora* plants may be introduced as either pollen or seed parent. (Saunders used a version of this to make the Quad hybrids.)



Figure 1. P21456 = Off1 x OB1 (counted tetraploid)



Figure 2. P23327 = Off3 x M1 (presumed tetraploid)

Every plant in this breeding program has a unique name, including all the species plants, because all seed-grown plants are different in their DNA sequences, even sister seedlings which greatly resemble one another. These slight differences can give rise to different results in a hybrid, as observed by Saunders in the use of "lobata of Perry", as an example, as compared to his results from other very similar-looking plants he had. The starting species plants for these two examples have the garden names of Off1, Off3, M1, and OB1. Names are kept short to save time and space on small pollinating tags. Off1, OB1, and M1 are (counted) tetraploids. Off3 has not been counted yet but is undoubtedly tetraploid. Off1, Off3, and OB1 are all plants from Galen Burrell, acquired as very small seedlings. M1 was grown from seed coming from Will McLewin in the UK. In expanded form, Off1 and Off3 are forms of *P. officinalis*, probably both *P. officinalis* ssp *italica*. OB1 came from Galen Burrell as a seedling of *P. obovata willmottiae*. These starting species plants were used in the following two combinations to produce plants P21456 and P23327. For those familiar with the features of *P. officinalis*, *P. obovata*, and *P. mairei*, you can see some features of each parent in each resulting hybrid.

This concludes introductory information. What has been done so far, and what may be done in the future, follows:

What has already been done

1. Hybrid crosses made every year.
 2. All data entered into databases.
 3. Many species plants grown from seed.
 4. Chromosomes counted; present total is 1051 different plants.
 5. Standardizing a method of drying and freezing pollen for use in succeeding years.
 6. Developing a system wherein numbers of seedling plants far in excess of available field area can still be grown and evaluated before transplanting to the field.
-

Future work

1. Breeding for a tall plant (>5 feet) that needs no staking (some are close to this).
 2. Breeding for a plant with very large leaflets. Plants with this feature have an air of tropical beauty.
 3. Breeding for a plant which greatly resembles a species plant but has a different and appealing flower form.
 4. Continuing to make hybrid crosses, especially ones not done by Saunders or anyone else. A few of these are shown in supplementary data on the APS website
 5. Continuing to count chromosomes as time allows.
 6. Continuing to scan all paperwork.
 7. Immediately using pollen from any "forma nova" to create seed for the next generation.
-

My peony project runs all year. Ever since the project became large and intricate, hybridization has taken precedence over time given to the peony convention. I intend to contribute to the body of knowledge about peonies, but it is likely to be by detailed record-keeping and writing for

The Bulletin. It is difficult to express the sense of well-being that can come from such activity, and I recommend it to anyone who is able to do so. But for me, most simply stated, the true purpose of the project is to conduct science in the presence of beauty. 🌹



'Gay Paree'

2023 Gold Medal Award Selection

The American Peony Society is pleased to announce **'Gay Paree'** as the recipient of the 2023 Gold Medal Award. **'Gay Paree'** is a cultivar belonging to the Lactiflora Group, often referred to as the garden peony or bush peony. The plant was hybridized by Edward Auten Jr., of Princeville, Illinois and was registered in 1933.



The cultivar produces vibrant, cerise pink guard petals surrounding a densely packed center of suffused cream petaloids. Flowers exhibit a Japanese/Anemone form. A central tuft of petaloids is often present, which matches the hue found in the guard petals. A pleasantly fragrant cultivar, **'Gay Paree'** is excellent for home cut flower arrangements and is sure to please. Two to three side buds, carried on long straight stems, can be expected to extend the bloom and cutting season.

'Gay Paree' is notably one of the most floriferous peonies and established clumps may be expected to produce in excess of 50 flowers during the late-midseason bloom period. Plants exhibit superior stem strength reaching 33 inches (85 cm) and carry the multitude of flowers to perfection. Bright deep green foliage provides a perfect back drop for the colorful blooms. A consistent performer, this cultivar provides a vivid and dramatic presentation, especially in large clumps. Plants are of easy culture, are disease resistant and have been grown successfully in a wide range of climate and soil conditions.

The striking plants provide colorful contrasts which never fail to lift the spirit and induce a smile. APS recommends **'Gay Paree'** and believes anyone growing it will value its many fine attributes. **'Gay Paree'** was recognized as superior landscape peony in 2014 through the Award of Landscape Merit, providing further support to its many worthy attributes.



Award of Landscape Merit Winner for 2023

Cory Tischman, APS Director - Eau Claire, Wisconsin

The American Peony Society seeks out and recognizes named peony cultivars exhibiting superior ornamental value in the landscape throughout the growing season and reliable performance in different growing conditions by designating them as winners of the Award of Landscape Merit. These peonies are self-supporting, are reliable for their flowering display, and importantly, provide nice foliage throughout the year.

The ALM program started in the mid-2000s from the ground up with the tireless efforts of a number of APS members contributing their free time to the project, including Don Hollingsworth, Carol Adelman, Harvey Buchite, Henry Chotkowski, Hazel Cook, Jack Nordick, Scott Parker, Claudia Schroer, and Eleanor Tickner. The ALM program exists thanks to their vision and perseverance.

These members faced some monumental challenges, namely: 1.) determining how to quantify the qualities of an ALM winner; 2.) deciding which cultivars to observe; 3.) engaging enough people to judge and score the cultivars to get a valid representative sample; and 4.) getting the scorecards turned in and scores compiled.

Because the APS is a volunteer-based organization, and peoples' lives change, the ALM has been in a "dormant" stage these past few years. Excitingly, there has been renewed interest in this program, and with that, a number of changes to hopefully streamline the process to make it easier to judge and score, and give recognition to some outstanding cultivars.

For 2023, out of all of the cultivars judged, there was one clear winner that performed the most consistently. Congratulations to **'May Lilac'**!

'May Lilac' (Saunders, 1950). Herbaceous hybrid, Single, Lavender, Early Season, 32" (81 cm), No Sidebuds, Slight fragrance. Many cup-shaped flowers of a lavender color with dark-colored flares emerging from the center with the petals softening to a lighter shade of lavender on the edges as the flowers open. Red stigmas, typically two to three, complement the flower color while providing a contrast of interest next to the cluster of yellow stamens.



'May Lilac' easily produces a mass of flowers resting nicely above the plant. Foliage as it emerges from the ground is a mixture of greens and reds and as it matures, lightens into a uniform lighter green that contrast well with darker green foliage of lactifloras in the garden. Leaflets are large and round (owing to one of its species parents), and do not fully reach the ground, leaving the lower portions of the stems exposed.



Images courtesy Mary Yee

If you are interested in becoming a judge or want to know more about the ALM program, please contact Cory Tischman at aps2@americanpeonysociety.org – We will be having ALM judge's training at the upcoming APS Convention in Syracuse, NY May 31st to June 4th, 2023. If you are attending the convention and want to attend this training, please sign up using the email address above. Looking forward to seeing you there!

Editor's note: *The American Peony Society recognizes the leadership and hard work of Cory Tischman, Jill Stevens and Nate Bremer, along with our participating judges, for revitalizing the ALM program.*

Pacific Northwest Peony Society

Carol Adelman, President – 503-910-1789 cell

Our first in-person meeting since COVID was held on November 12, 2022 at the Hegewald Center in Stevenson, Washington. Carol Adelman shared methods and techniques of pollen harvesting, storage and application that she uses in her peony hybridizing program. She also covered seed germination methods and transplanting.

Steve Smith, official APS photographer, showed us photos of the 2022 APS Convention which was held at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens in Ann Arbor in June. He explained the quite involved process to get flowers prepared for exhibition, getting blooms to the show, forcing them to stay closed or to open so they are at their prime at the judging time, and putting them in the correct classification on the show table. Steve also shared photos of the peony garden at the university and the open gardens in the area.

Additional APS news from the Pacific northwest: Carol and Jim Adelman entries received Grand Champion for '**Pastelegance**', Reserve Champion for '**Sonoma Halo**'. Also on Court of Honor their entries of '**Monsieur Jules Elie**', '**Commando**' and '**Henry Sass**'. Carol Schneider's entries of '**Koshino Yuki**' and *p. officinalis* '**Anemoneflora Rosea**' were also selected for Court of Honor. Eleanor Butler's floral arrangement placed first in the junior exhibitor category.

Carol Adelman was officially awarded the Bertrand H. Farr Lifetime Achievement Award for leadership, education and an invitation to beauty in the peony world. Piet Weistra donated flowers for the judged arrangements and was a volunteer to sell peony blooms to the public for their enjoyment.

The business meeting focused on the timing and location of our Feb/March annual meeting as well as possible educational topics. Lore Sampson provided a delicious luncheon for us. The day concluded with an auction of peonies and also lilies from our member Judith Freeman.

Our ANNUAL MEETING will be held on February 25th from 9:00 – 5:00 at the Wilsonville Holiday Inn, 25425 SW 95th Avenue, Wilsonville, OR 97070. We are looking forward to seeing our members together again! 🍷

Wisconsin Peony Society

Cory Tischman, President – contact at wipeonysociety.president@gmail.com

Around this time of year is when I start longing to see green and in particular, peonies. The winters in Wisconsin can be quite long, with snow sometimes sticking to the ground as early as October and not melt completely away until early May. Some new cultivars that I recently acquired and am hoping to see this spring are '**Attar of Roses**', '**Mandaleen**', '**Black Swan**', and '**William Sheraden**'. These were shared by a dear friend, which I think really encapsulates one of the captivating aspects of peonies – they are long-lasting and can connect people through generations. When I tell other people that I grow peonies, I hear numerous stories about how some relative of theirs also grew them and for some, they now have a piece of that same plant in their own yard along with a story to go along with it. I don't often hear that same story with other plants. So, when thinking about gifts for loved ones or wanting to create new memories, you can simply share a peony.

Our next meeting will be on March 4th which will be our spring educational meeting and election for WPS BOD and officers. Our educational speaker is currently yet to be determined but will likely be a virtual presentation. You must be a WPS member to attend this virtual presentation. Any questions may be directed to Vice President, Jordan Kabat: jordan_kabat@bostonconservatory.edu

We are always on the lookout for interested individuals who would like to volunteer or be interested in a leadership position in one of our committees. If you are interested, you can contact me using the email address above. Otherwise, if you want to find out more information about what we are doing here in Wisconsin, check out our website: www.wipeonysociety.org or visit us on Facebook: 'Wisconsin Peony Society Group.' 🍷

Canadian Peony Society

Joan Campbell - Brantford, Ontario Canada

Canadian Peony Society Celebrates 25th Anniversary with the Shakespearean Garden Project

The Canadian Peony Society's 25th anniversary project started back in early 2021 when we were approached by the "Friends of the Shakespearean Garden" to help them develop a peony display in their garden in Stratford, Ontario. The project will culminate this year with the donation of 75 peony roots to the Garden.

Stratford is a small city in south-western Ontario, surrounded by farm country. It is famous for its Stratford Shakespearean Festival Theatre, a band of gardens stretching along the Avon River running through the middle of the city, and a bevy of white swans that frequent the river during the summer months.

The Garden was officially opened in 1936 by the then Governor General of Canada, Lord Tweedsmuir, on the site of a woolen mill that burned in 1922. A 60-foot chimney from the original mill still stands. The focus of our project is a 270-foot bed with a walkway on one side



Shakespearean Garden, Stratford, Ontario
April 2022



CPS members, Friends of the Shakespearean Garden and City of Stratford employees meet to celebrate fall root planting in the first 3 beds on October 2022

and a wall on the other. We decided to plant the first 3 sections in 2022 and complete the next 6 sections this year.

Why the Shakespearean Garden was selected for this project

The Canadian Peony Society has had a lot of experience in making donations to public gardens, with varying levels of success. Learning from the past, we deemed this garden to have several important elements in its favour. First, it is in public hands and the responsibility for maintenance rests with the City. Second it has a volunteer organization whose mandate is to support the garden, thereby putting pressure on the municipality to continue to allocate resources to it. Also, it is in a city that receives a lot of visitors who come to attend the theatre and enjoy the gardens. Last and certainly not least, it has good soil and good drainage.

The scope of the project

A visit to the garden in April 2022 with the City Horticulturist and representatives from the Friends led to the development of the scope of work for the project. We agreed to respect the linear design and aim to plant a double row of peonies down the back of the 9 sections of the garden. Peony selection and layout would be the responsibilities of CPS, the City would do the planting, and the Friends would cheer us on.

Criteria for peony selection

We set a number of goals to achieve in plant selection:

- showcase Canadian hybridized peonies if possible
- choose good landscape peonies which don't require support
- aim for 6 weeks of bloom with a variety of flower types and colours
- support Canadian vendors

We decided that the logistics of taking root donations from individuals would be very difficult to coordinate. As it was, we kept our treasurer busy receiving root orders and delivering them to the City Horticulturist for planting.

A "peony wish list" was developed, in part selected from past winners of the APS Award of Landscape Merit. Canadian vendors were asked which roots from the wish list they could supply in 2022 or 2023. Our thanks go out to the four vendors who stepped forward with roots and donations: Pivoines Capano, En Fleurs, Peony World, and Dutch Girl.

Celebration

In October we met again with the Friends and City staff to celebrate the planting of the first 35 peony roots. A mild fall and very late frost acted in our favour because one of our peony orders did not arrive until November. We have our fingers crossed that those peonies had at least a bit of time to develop a few feeder roots.

And the work continues

In the spring we will revisit the site to see how our first planting has fared and refine our strategy for root acquisition and planting in the remaining 6 sections of the garden. We will also work towards placing a plaque to acknowledge the CPS 25th anniversary project, and developing a map that can be accessed online to allow visitors to identify the peonies.

It has been my pleasure to be the coordinator of this project and to work with its many contributors. Peonies being what they are, this is a gift that will give joy for many years to come. 🍁

Editor's Note: *The APS congratulates the Canadian Peony Society on their 25th Anniversary project. Regional and local peony organizations who are asked to participate in public garden projects will find many "best practices" in this article.*

Duluth Peony Society

Elizabeth Donley, Duluth, Minnesota

President Don Kienholz and Elizabeth Donley are presenting a Peony Conversation to a group of Wisconsin Master Gardeners, Monday January 9th, from 6-7 pm, at the Superior Airport Terminal building. Geraldine Gomes Hughs, coordinator for this group, contacted us to present primarily about Itoh/Intersectionals, and also general woody and herbaceous care.

We are looking forward to this early new year peony conversation, enjoying the nurseries sharing their new seasons listings, and planning ahead for the annual Duluth Peony Show near the end of June.

Best wishes to Harvey and Brigitte Buchite on their new adventure. 🌻

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“Happiness is a Vibe” – Photo courtesy Alicia Li, APS 2021 Photo Contest