

# The AMERICAN PEONY SOCIETY Bulletin

Fall 2024; No. 411



'Coral Charm' (Wissing, 1964)  
Photo courtesy Steve Smith



**The Charms of Summer**

## THE AMERICAN PEONY SOCIETY

APS is a nonprofit horticultural organization incorporated as a membership corporation under the laws of the State of Wisconsin. APS is organized exclusively for educational and scientific purposes, and especially to promote, encourage and foster the development and improvement of the genus *Paeonia* and public interest therein. These purposes are expressly limited so that APS qualifies as an exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

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**ISSN 0003-0384**  
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Dues are paid for the calendar year. Dues received before August 25 are recorded for the current year and members will be sent all four issues of *The Bulletin* for that year (while supplies last). Dues received between August 25 and November 25 will receive the December issue of *The Bulletin* and all issues for the following year. Memberships received after November 25 will be recorded for the following year. Online reading is available for the five most current *Bulletin* issues. Those with online-only membership will not receive printed Bulletins. Membership information and an online registration form are available on the APS website. Individual memberships are for one or two persons at the same address, receiving one copy of *The Bulletin*. Commercial memberships are for one business and one or two persons at the same address. Institutional membership information is available on the APS website. All memberships are non-transferable. Please notify APS promptly of address changes. Missed issues must be claimed within one year. APS is not responsible for undeliverable mailing addresses.

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# The American Peony Society Bulletin®

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Fall 2024  
Issue No. 411

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# President's Message Fall 2024

Lois Girton, Ames, Iowa

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It is both an honor and challenge to succeed Nate Bremer as President and to assume a position once held by my peony hero A.P. Saunders. The organization is in great shape because of Nate's leadership these past four years. During his tenure, APS has re-incorporated in the State of Wisconsin, obtained 501 (c) (3) status, brought in several new Directors and Officers, created new committees, made contributions to peony research and public gardens, and seen an increase in membership. Thank you, Nate!



The APS website (which, thankfully, Nate continues to manage) serves as a source of accurate information about "all things peony". The APS Bulletin, superbly edited by Kim Bremer, is consistently on schedule and full of interesting articles. Winter online presentations and monthly newsletters now connect us more frequently. Coming out of the pandemic, APS has held exciting conventions the past three years. The convention and fall online auctions have helped put us on solid financial footing. Having participated in many of these activities, I feel well positioned to continue the great work of APS.

For the many members whom I've never met, a short introduction. I am originally from Alberta, Canada, and obtained my BSc. and MSc. in Genetics at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. I met my husband Jack there when he came to U of A to do his doctorate. After our graduations we moved to California for his postdoc, then to Nebraska for his first faculty position. While there I obtained my PhD in the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (which included, unfortunately, only a brief introduction to peony diseases). We then moved to Ames, Iowa, his hometown, and the home of Iowa State University. In 1995 we moved to our current home, the remnant of a working farm. Great soil, never stripped, and enough room to develop way too many gardens, and, apparently, shelter for wildlife.

Admittedly, I did not start growing peonies very early in my gardening life, but my interest has been intense and my journey unique. While most start

by growing double-flowered lactifloras, I first grew species peonies, hybrid woody peonies, and Itohs. A few years in, I found that the "species looks" of the first-generation herbaceous hybrids bred by A.P. Saunders also appealed to me. I've been intent on assembling all his introductions, checking each acquisition for authenticity, and learning about Saunders' life ever since. Information has been shared via a website and will soon be available in a book.

Unfortunately, misidentification of cultivars is not confined to those bred by A.P. Saunders. For this reason, I have helped initiate a Peony Reference Garden program for APS. Currently six public gardens have joined our pilot project. The participating gardens will allow people to see accurately identified cultivars and introduce visitors to APS via a garden plaque and availability of APS brochures. With many public gardens trending towards creating beautiful venues for weddings and other outdoor events or even to landscaping with only native plants, it is important for plant societies to advocate for maintaining plant collections. One of my goals as President is to expand on the number and support for these gardens.

Nate did an excellent job of recruiting APS members to become more involved by serving on committees. We still need individuals to help with several of our now almost 20 committees. Please get in touch if you have interest or questions.



This fawn appreciates Saunders peonies (excellent taste!)

## Bulletin Board Announcements

- 1) Fall Auction:** The fall online auction opens at 8 a.m. CDT on Thursday, September 19th and runs through 5 p.m. CDT Sunday, September 22nd. Donations of peony roots, seeds, and peony-related items may be made through the member portal (Home>>Get Involved>>Donate) up until September 15th. Due to import/export regulations, we regret that the auction will only be open to members residing in the USA.
- 2) Speakers:** APS is often asked to provide speakers to local garden clubs. If you are willing to give a presentation near your location, please let APS know by contacting Sheryl Lawson ([contact@americanpeonysociety.org](mailto:contact@americanpeonysociety.org)) or Lois Girton ([president@americanpeonysociety.org](mailto:president@americanpeonysociety.org)). Don't have a presentation ready? Bernie Miller put basic peony information into a PowerPoint which we can share with you. We also welcome others to develop shareable presentations on more specialized topics (woodies, Itohs, species, heirlooms, etc.).
- 3) Retiring Board Members:** Craig Aiken, Leena Ljestrang, and Linette Sorrentino all left the board as of the 2024 annual member meeting. We thank them for their years of service.
- 4) New Board Members:** At the 2024 annual member meeting, three new Directors were elected. Rich Grenier from Minot, Maine has joined the Award of Landscape Merit (ALM) committee, the Scientific committee and the Nomenclature committee. Matt Snyder of Coatesville, Pennsylvania is also on the ALM committee and is co-chairing the 2026 national convention in the Philadelphia area. Melissa Sullivan of Lexington, Kentucky has joined the Reference Garden and Bulletin Editing committees. APS is fortunate to have new talent and wider geographic representation.
- 5) Monthly Newsletters:** Bernie Miller is the new e-newsletter editor. If you have not been receiving an email with timely announcements and reminders, please check your account in the member portal to be sure APS has a current e-mail for you. If a correction is needed,



please alert Liz Best ([membership@americanpeonysociety.org](mailto:membership@americanpeonysociety.org)) and Bernie Miller ([programs@americanpeonysociety.org](mailto:programs@americanpeonysociety.org)). Also be sure the newsletters are not being blocked by adding americanpeonysociety.ccsend.com to your contacts. You may unsubscribe at any time.



## 2024 American Peony Society Awards



*The American Peony Society has developed and promoted numerous awards over the past 100 years in support of the peony. These awards recognize not only outstanding peony flowers and plants but also the people important to this lovely plant. American Peony Society members who have given of themselves to promote the peony in a variety of ways are awarded, including hybridizers, APS Board members, growers, peony ambassadors, authors, and various personalities important to the peony world. Awards Chair Steve Smith presented the 2024 awards at the APS Convention on June 3.*

### **A.P. Saunders Memorial Medal**

The award is named in honor of A.P. Saunders, the first hybridizer to undertake an extensive hybridizing program which produced outstanding cultivars.

Many are still popular and form the basis of hybridizing programs today.

### **Nate Bremer – Reedsville, Wisconsin**

Hybridizer, educator, mentor, and propagator, Nate Bremer is recognized internationally for developing advanced generations of woody and herbaceous peonies with a special focus on lutea hybrids. Ninety-three of his introductions are currently listed in the APS Peony Registry, and he maintains a prolific seedling program.

With years of experience hybridizing orchids, Hemerocallis, and now peonies, Nate has honed a critical eye for cultivar selection. An expert in



North American woody peonies, he continues to successfully introduce diversified genetics into their background, and works toward creating cultivars that are more vigorous and fertile - woody and herbaceous alike.

He actively allows other hybridizers to piggyback off his advancements to further their own programs, and enthusiastically champions young individuals interested in hybridizing. Popular recent introductions include 'Dione,' 'Origin of Serenity,' 'Europa,' 'Wisteria Reflections,' 'Callisto,' 'Aquila,' and 'Kim.' Nate has also been instrumental in forwarding William Siedl's hybridization program, propagating and introducing a variety of Siedl's herbaceous and woody peonies. Notably, his herbaceous cultivar 'Dreamtime' (Seidl/Bremer, 2013) was honored with the Gold Medal in 2024.

With a background in teaching and business, Nate excels in communication and readily shares his expertise. He has served as a dedicated member in the American Peony Society, and has been instrumental in the development of the APS website, the online Peony Registry, and the new APS Code of Ethics for commercial members. We express gratitude for his longstanding service to the APS and eagerly anticipate his future cultivar releases.

## **The Bertrand H. Farr Lifetime Achievement Award**

This lifetime achievement award is given to APS members who have contributed to the society and peony world. Authors, growers, ambassadors, organizers, and APS leadership are examples of those who have been recognized for this prestigious award.

### **David Sorrentino - Chaska, Minnesota**

David Sorrentino's impact on the society runs deep, characterized by his



steady demeanor that guides those around him toward positivity. David is often recognized as the quiet partner of Linette Sorrentino, co-organizer of APS flower shows, and the previous vice president of APS. Alongside Linette, David has played a pivotal role in orchestrating some of the society's most exceptional contemporary flower shows.

Generous with his time, David eagerly promotes the exhibition and cultivation of peonies to all enthusiasts. Known affectionately as the "Master of the Flower Show," he shares his expertise as an educator, leading seminars on peony division, and of-



fering invaluable advice to fellow members of the Minnesota Peony Society. As an organizer, David is unmatched, dedicating long hours to convention planning and providing unwavering support and guidance to his peers. His numerous contributions to both the society and the world of peonies make him a strong candidate for the Bertrand H. Farr Lifetime Achievement Award. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to David for his years of devoted service and support to the American Peony Society.

## The American Peony Society Medal

This award recognizes the meritorious contributions of individuals or groups to the American Peony Society - and the peony world - through research, support of important initiatives, art, imagery, literature, authoring, publicity, ambassadorship, or other peony-related actions.

The Awards Committee is pleased to present the Medal to two outstanding recipients this year.

### Dan Rouillier – Clinton, New York

Dan Rouillier has garnered recognition by APS for his critical role in creating the largest and most complete public garden display of rare A.P. Saunders peonies.



Saunders, the “father of the modern peony,” and a professor of chemistry at Hamilton College, Clinton, N.Y., bred his peonies while living on campus. The peonies left the college and the nearby property when his daughter Silvia closed the family nursery.

In 1996, Dan Rouillier and Don Croft (now retired) cleared overgrowth in the Grant Garden of the Root Glen Arboretum at Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y. — the first step in creating an important reservoir of rare peonies hybridized by

Saunders.

The garden’s first peonies were donated by Silvia’s friend and neighbor, Lee Kreinheder. The collection initially focused on woody peonies, many of which were purchased from the Reath Nursery or from Song Sparrow Nursery. Recently, Dan worked with collectors to acquire Saunders herbaceous peonies.

One of Dan's important contributions has been creating one of the best documented public peony collections in the country. He has mapped, double labeled, photographed, and prepared extensive lists of the collection; and has worked tirelessly to ensure that the peonies are correctly identified.

In 2023, Dan played a pivotal role in hosting the APS national convention at Hamilton College, a highlight in his mission to restore Saunders peonies to their roots at the campus. Attendees marveled at the meticulously grown and curated display.

Dan also collaborates with public gardens across the country to establish Saunders collections and preserve rare cultivars. Curators and staff of other public gardens who have acquired Saunders peonies during A.P. or Silvia Saunders's lifetimes deserve our thanks.

### Sharon Schmitz – Madison, Wisconsin

Sharon has dedicated herself to the advancement of peonies through her active involvement in APS, the Minnesota Peony Society (MPS), and the Wisconsin Peony Society (WPS) for many years.



Stepping in as the membership secretary for APS during long-time secretary Greta Kessenich's illness, she also served as the membership secretary for MPS for an extensive period. She presently holds the same role with WPS.

Sharon is currently the face of *The Bulletin* for APS advertisers, managing communications, contracts, and placement with a smile.

Her generosity extends beyond administrative duties. Sharon has generously contributed peonies from her collection to auctions held by local and regional societies. Moreover, she has selflessly provided divisions of peonies to numerous individuals, enabling them to experience the joy of cultivating these beautiful flowers.

Sharon's commitment goes beyond material donations. She has freely shared her time and expertise, assisting with meetings, conventions, and other peony-related events. Her advocacy for peonies is evident in her daily life, with peony decals adorning her car, spreading awareness wherever she travels.

# 2024 American Peony Society Exhibition

## “Minnesota’s Peony Pioneers”

David and Linette Sorrentino, Exhibition Co-Chairs – Chaska, MN

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Since the beginning of the American Peony Society (APS) in 1903, flower exhibitions have been held in conjunction with the annual convention. On June 8 and 9, 2024, during the 121st year of the APS convention, the 117th year of the flower show took place in Bloomington, MN.

The theme of this year’s show was *Minnesota’s Peony Pioneers*. Sever-

al of the 17 Minnesota hybridizers who have introduced peony varieties remain active today, including Swenson Gardens. Four flowers on the Court of Honor (COH) were of Minnesota origin. Many Minnesota-hybridized varieties were found on the show floor, especially in the *Lactiflora* types.

The 2024 show was large. There were 955 entries in the class-



David and Linette Sorrentino with their Grand Champion 'Romance'

es, with a total number of 1404 blooms displayed (Wow!); yet the exhibition was not nearly as sizable as the peony exhibitions in the first half of the 20th century, when the storied Brand Peony Farms of Faribault, MN, was active. Minnesota has truly been central to the history of the American peony.

Deciding when to stage entries is all about timing. Judging starts after the show floor is closed to entries, so determining when flowers will look their best is the most challenging aspect of showing peonies.

Exhibitors will typically stage tighter blooms up to a couple days before the deadline to allow ample time to fully hydrate and open. Flowers that are near peak may be put back into cold storage to preserve their freshness. Next, preparation turns into a full tilt production as flowers are made ready for the show floor.

Classification and staging are also hectic, as exhibition volunteers doublecheck correct class names and entry details prior to placing flowers on the show floor. Displaying peonies at their best requires constant rearranging of the flowers to have appropriate spacing and enough room for all the entries.

## **Staging and Judging**

The deadline for entries was Saturday at 8 a.m.; however, the preparation room opened and exhibitors began staging stems and creating artistic designs several days earlier. Volunteers Jill Stevens and Steve Rutz worked tirelessly to verify correct classes before entries were placed on the show floor.

Classes began filling up as runners continued to bring more flowers. It became evident that classes would need to be split, since there were more than 40 entries in some classes. Twenty-one exhibitors entered more than 1,000 flowers.

Three judging teams were formed along with clerks and, after several hours of debate, the ribbon winners were all selected. The Court of Honor had 18 placements, each receiving a rosette.

The number of seedlings entered was a surprise. Several hybridizers brought outstanding soon-to-be-introduced varieties, resulting in a total of 71 entries in the seedling division. Scott Parkers's "Sharon's Blush" was much admired for its superior color variation. The variety was named after Sharon Schmitz who just received the American Peony Society Medal. Because of the number and diversity of seedlings, a COH rosette was awarded to a Lactiflora, a Hybrid, and a Woody seedling instead of just picking one best seedling.

Don Hollingsworth along with two other seedling judges selected a Solaris Farm seedling (NB-H34A, **Pastelorama** x **Pastelegance**) as Best Hybrid, and another Solaris Farm seedling (W12-2023, 'Age of Gold' x 'Wisteria Reflections') as Best Woody. Swenson Gardens received the honor of Best Lactiflora for a stunning seedling (59-29C, 'Butterflies in Flight' x 'The Fawn'). The judges selected the Solaris hybrid seedling NB-H34A as the Best in Show Seedling. The peony had superior form and color that was truly unique.

### Artistic Arrangements

Space in the Artistic Division was limited; however, 38 entries were entered in the Youth, the Novice, and the Open Sections. The Open

Section was the largest with 27 arrangements, the Novice Section had nine, and there were two Youth entries. Designers bring their own containers and material while APS supplies the cut peonies that must be central to the design. Thank you to Adelman Peony Gardens for supplying the cut flowers for the arrangers to use. The classes were selected using Minnesota hybridized peonies as the class name.

Many of the designs must follow the National Garden Clubs design rules but some classes allow 'Exhibitors Choice.' It is always wonderful to see entries in the Youth Section. Lois Girton's granddaughter, Amelia Radke, received a blue ribbon while Greta Hinkle came in with a close second. The three other major awards were:

Best Novice Arrangement which was won by Addie Evans; the Reserve Champion was selected from the Open Section class "Romance," and was won by Rene Lynch; the Grand Champion Artistic Design was selected from the class "Paul Bunyan," and was won by Denese Erickson. This was a creative design using wood and peonies given to Denese by Keith Swenson, including some of his new introductions. Congratulations all!



Denese Erickson with her Grand Champion Design

## Special Awards

Special awards were presented at the evening banquet. Stephen Rutz received the Allan Rogers Memorial Award (Pacific Northwest Peony Society – Best Hybrid) for '**Old Faithful.**' Nate Bremer of Solaris Farms received the William Seidl Memorial Award (Solaris Farms – Best Lutea). Nate also won the Sweepstakes Award for receiving 20 blue ribbons, the most of any entrant. Nate brought a lot of woodies! The Best Intersectional Award went to Swenson Gardens for '**Bartzella.**' The Reserve Champion Award went to Solaris Farms for a very nice specimen of '**Pluto.**' Since the theme of the exhibition was Minnesota Hybridizers, it was exciting to see that the Grand Champion of the show was a Minnesota hybridized peony (Lins, 1967, Cologne MN). The Grand Champion for the 2024 APS Flower Show was '**Romance,**' by

David and Linette Sorrentino. The entry also received the Ben Gowen Memorial Award for best Lactiflora.

The show was well-received by the public: many people had expressions of awe on their faces when they experienced the breadth and beauty of the cut flowers and artistic designs. The show once again demonstrated how valuable the APS flower show is to educate the public, engage members, and promote the peony. Where else can you go to see so many varieties peonies in one place? Thank you to all the American Peony Society and Minnesota Peony Society members for helping to make a successful event.

**The full results are posted on the APS website at: [Learn>>Awards>>Show Results.](#)**





# 2024 American Peony Society Convention Recap

Bloomington, Minnesota  
June 5 – June 9th

**Nick Maycher, APS Director -Edmonton, Alberta**

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O, Peony-eers! Minnesota, *L'Étoile du Nord*, you had us starstruck with a stellar display of peonies and friendly faces! With a central theme of Minnesota's peony pioneers, this year's convention delivered a five-day *paeonia* pilgrimage steeped in history during our visit to this gem, which lies in the peony mecca that is the American Midwest. This sense of history was certainly palpable when viewing outstanding introductions from notable Minnesotans like Brand, Franklin, Lins, Tischler, Pehrson, and more on the garden tours and exhibition tables, and in hearing fantastic stories from local Minnesota Peony Society (MPS) members, who did an oh-so-wonderful job of providing a healthy dose of Minnesotan hospitality.

The garden tours delighted and dazzled and were kicked off with a visit to Swenson Gardens, a forty-acre farm near Howard Lake, Minnesota. Hosts Keith and Becky Swenson, who are celebrating twenty-two years of exclusively growing peonies, delivered a history of Swenson Gardens, and along with lead

hybridizer Danny Zabel and their staff encouraged members to stroll through their collection and made themselves generously available to answer questions. Members enjoyed an outstanding (and up-standing) intersectional display and the viewing of many seedlings under evaluation.

An unforgettable visit awaited members at the personal garden of Jill Stevens, APS Director and MPS VP. This remarkable garden pushed the conceptual boundaries of a personal collection with over 1,200 cultivars! Equally, or perhaps even more impressive, was how well labeled, well grown, and well-tended specimens were when growing at this ambitious scale. Jill's garden served as an inspiration, an excellent living reference, and a reminder of what is possible when one has determination and a goal in mind.

Local hosts David and Linette Sorrentino, long-time devoted APS and MPS leadership members, welcomed members to their gardens, which featured phenomenal hardscaping and several cutting-edge

recent introductions. Minnesotan introductions were well represented throughout the gardens, giving visitors a glimpse into local peony history.

The tours were over all too soon but went out with a bang at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum (MLA). Members were given exclusive access to the Research and Extension Peony Plot, not open to the public, which would later be the subject of a presentation by Brandon Miller, MLA Curator of Plant Collections. After lunch in the MacMillan Auditorium, members were mesmerized by a symphony of color at the Lang Peony Walk, which was in full bloom and proudly displayed Minnesotan introductions and specimens supplied by Minnesota nurseries. Attendees were also given the opportunity to browse cata-

logs and materials from Minnesota growers in the MLA library archive.

A resplendent flower exhibition wowed convention-goers and the public alike and featured remarkable, one-of-a-kind floral arrangements and an especially robust woody peony and seedling display, offering not only an appreciation for the past but an exhilarating glimpse into the future. The hotel foyer was abuzz with a flurry of activity featuring seed and vendor sales and informational presentations and panels, leading to an enchanting banquet evening of personal and exhibition awards and an electric live auction! Though our journey was winding and at times moved all too fast, we all shared the same final destination: peony enlightenment!

**Join us as we share the experience in photos.**



Keith Swenson delivers the history of Swenson Gardens.



Becky Swenson strikes a pose with APS Director Brandie Orchard.



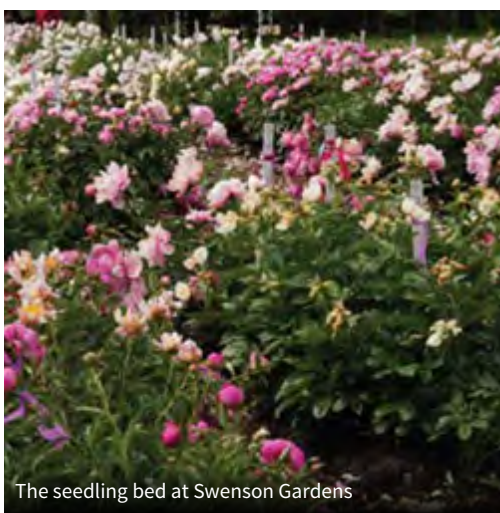
Lead hybridizer Dan Zabel greets members.



Attendees enjoy the intersectional collection and seedling displays at Swenson Gardens.



Peony tours pleased fans of all ages.



The seedling bed at Swenson Gardens





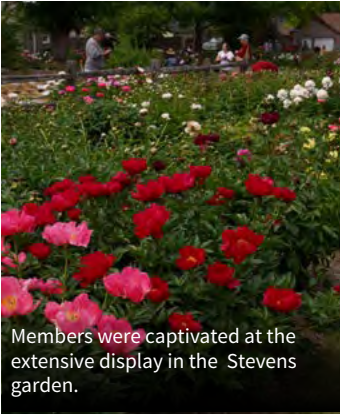
Playing favorites: Jill won't hesitate to tell you that her favorite peony is **'Orange Glory'** (Auten, 1956).



Minnesota introduction **'Tonka Cloud'** seen in the Stevens garden. (Anderson/Swenson 2020)



Minnesota introduction **'Wilford Johnson'** (Franklin/Tishler, 1966)



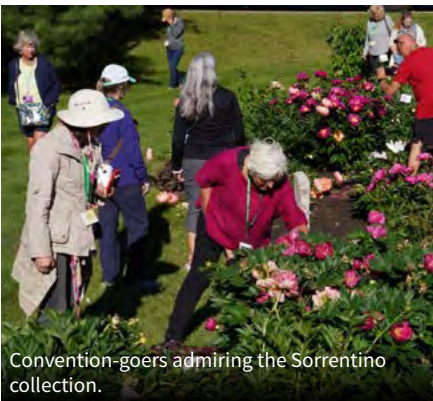
Members were captivated at the extensive display in the Stevens garden.



A living catalog: Members marvel at the breadth of the 1,200+ cultivar Stevens collection



The Sorrentino's streamside garden offers visitors a moment of tranquility.



Convention-goers admiring the Sorrentino collection.



Linette Sorrentino fields questions about her extensive collection.





David Sorrentino explains the layout of their gardens, which contain a whopping 750 specimens of 475 cultivars.



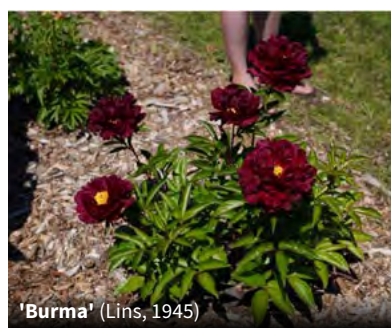
Visitors explore the MLA Research and Extension plot.



Brandon Miller, PhD and MLA Curator of Plant Collections, delivers a presentation to members on the research plot and discusses the project with Don Hollingsworth.



Spotted at the MLA Research and Extension plot: **'Better Times'** (Franklin, 1941)

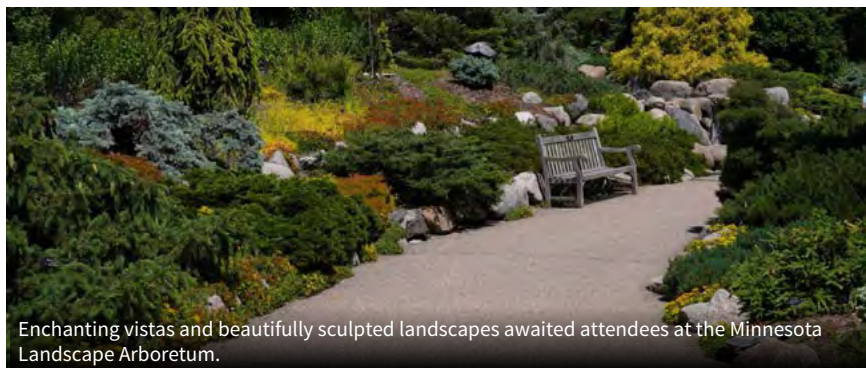


**'Burma'** (Lins, 1945)





The Lang Peony Walk greets visitors in full glory. The collection at the MLA numbers 240 specimens of 191 cultivars and began in 1961 with plants obtained from Silvia Saunders.



Enchanting vistas and beautifully sculpted landscapes awaited attendees at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum.



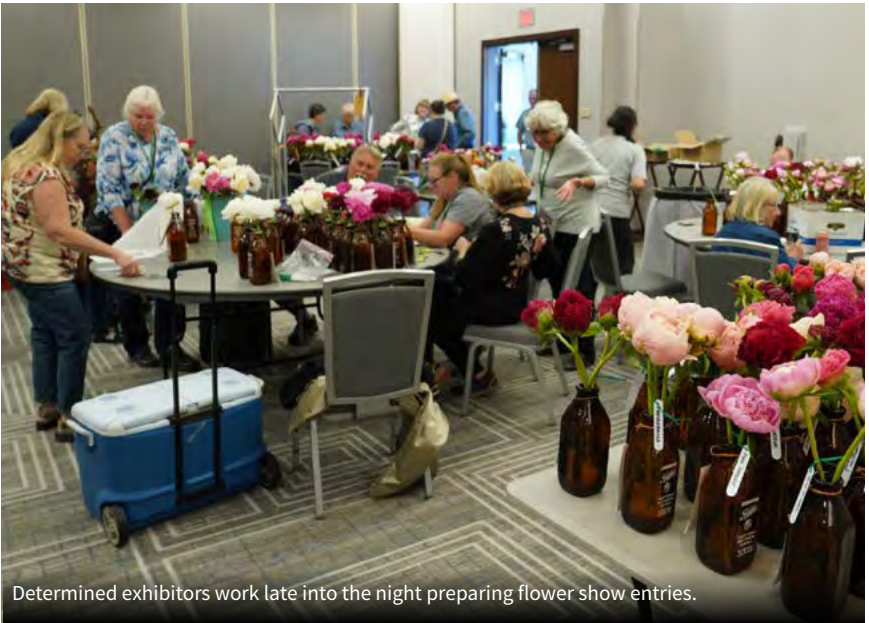
Cory Tischman, APS Vice President, educates and invites attentive members to participate in the Award of Landscape Merit judging process.



Minnesota introduction 'Waikiki' (Lins, 1967).

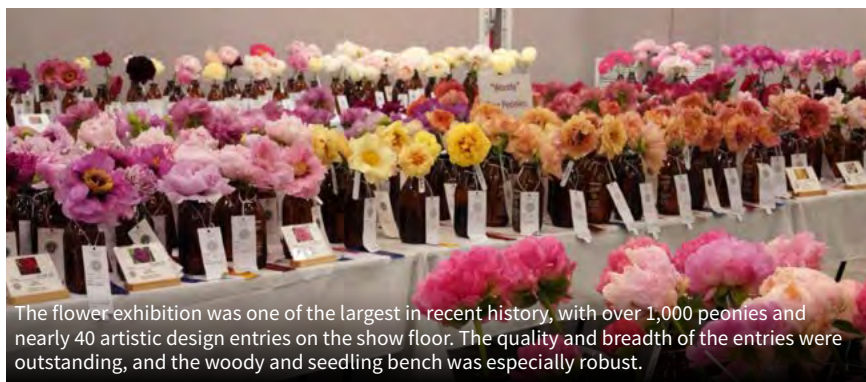


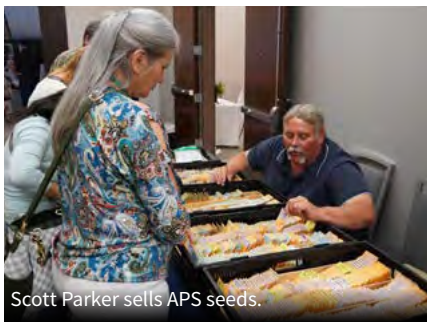
The Minnesota Arboretum Research and Extension Peony Plot contains roughly 200 cultivars, including herbaceous, intersectional, and woody peony specimens.



Determined exhibitors work late into the night preparing flower show entries.







Scott Parker sells APS seeds.



Special judge Don Hollingsworth lends his much appreciated expertise to the judging of seedlings.



Don Smith discusses intersectional advancements.



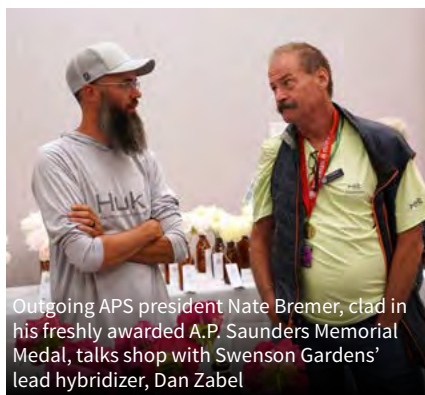
Dr. Kent Crossley, former APS and MPS president, is perfectly suited to share the rich and colorful local peony history during his presentation on Minnesota's peony pioneers.



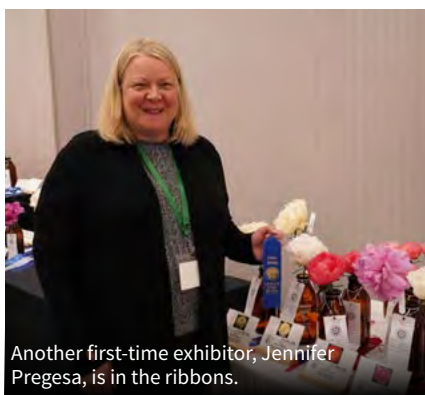
First time exhibitor JJ Jordan is delighted to come away with ribbons for his entries.



Carol Schneider's ribbon-winning design features her grandfather's copper vase — a family heirloom awarded to R.C. Schneider as a prize for his 1939 MPS entry.



Outgoing APS president Nate Bremer, clad in his freshly awarded A.P. Saunders Memorial Medal, talks shop with Swenson Gardens' lead hybridizer, Dan Zabel



Another first-time exhibitor, Jennifer Pregesa, is in the ribbons.



## *A Simply Splendid Peony Refresher*

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Peonies have long warmed our hearts and graced our homes. At the APS Convention, we learned that members enjoy using these blooming beauties in the kitchen. The list of culinary possibilities includes jellies, jams, salad dressings, and simple syrup.

Simple syrup is a concoction, in equal amounts, of two ingredients: sugar and water. The simple science behind this old recipe is the creation of a liquid sweetener that is easier to dissolve than granulated sugar. The basic recipe calls for sugar and water but can be infused with mint, berries, peppers, and peonies. The resulting syrup can be used to flavor teas, lemonades, cocktails, and mocktails.

Here, APS members Larry Leger and Steve Smith, S + L Gardens, share a recipe discovered at a garden party hosted by Pacific Northwest Peony Society member, Jenelle Mazzoncini.

The original recipe calls for pink or blush petals. However, Steve gathered some colorful reds for his test batch, and believes the red petals to be a bit...bitter. He suggests trial and error to find the preferred flavor.





## **Peony-Infused Simple Syrup**

1 cup loosely packed peony petals

2 cups boiling water

2 cups sugar \*

Juice from ½ lemon or lime, if using blush peony petals

\*Note: Stevia or sugar substitute can be used

### **Directions**

1. Remove petals, wash with cold water
2. Pour boiling water over petals and steep 8 hours or overnight
3. Strain liquid from petals and pour into a saucepan. Heat and add sugar
4. Simmer until sugar is completely dissolved. Remove from heat and cool completely.
5. Add lemon or lime juice (Petal color will affect syrup color. Blush petals create a yellowish syrup that brightens to blush pink once lemon juice is added.)

*Peony Infused Simple Syrup can be refrigerated up to a month*

There you have it! An easy peony culinary concoction to tuck away and try on a festive occasion next spring or summer. Cheers.

### **Perfect Summer Peony Spritzer (per glass)**

1 oz chilled peony infused simple syrup

½ oz lime juice

4 oz seltzer water or Prosecco

Ice if desired

Mix ingredients in glass. Give a little stir. Enjoy

# The Language of Peonies

## Semi-double Flower Form

A wide range of semi-double flower configurations exist. Semi-double cultivars often exhibit wonderfully arranged petals of different sizes and shapes. Many have beautifully colored stigmas and stamens which create an ornate display.

The semi-double flower form is found in all groups of peonies (herbaceous, woody & intersectional) and may be quite variable from one cultivar to the next.

Flowers which have 15 or more petals and exhibit at least some naturally visible reproductive parts are generally considered semi-double in form. Visible reproductive structures may be: stigmas, carpels and/or stamens. Stamens may or may not have pollen, as with many peony cultivars.

In contrast, double form flowers have petal configurations which completely hide any stamens, stigmas and carpels. It can be difficult to differentiate between the two forms, which is evident throughout the Peony Registry. Some older registrations may be designated incorrectly by today's standards due to changes in definition and convention over time.

For more detailed information about the Semi-double flower form, visit the APS website: [Learn>>Herbaceous Peonies>>Flower Types & Anatomy](#). See the article link at the bottom of the page: "Peony Flower Anatomy I, II, III"



Single-form herbaceous flower



Semi-double form herbaceous flower



Double-form herbaceous peony flower

## *How Do I Plant Bare Root Herbaceous Peonies?*

**Jill Stevens, APS Director – Benson, Minnesota**

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After carefully choosing your new peony and patiently waiting, your peony root has arrived for fall planting.

Fall is the best time to plant peonies – the recommended best practice of the American Peony Society (APS). Why? The reason is that peonies grow nearly all their roots in the cooling soils of fall!

Here are some preparation and planting tips to help your new peony thrive.

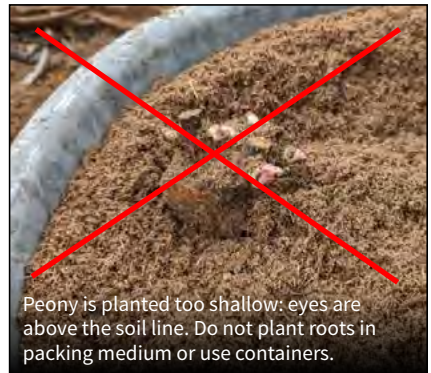
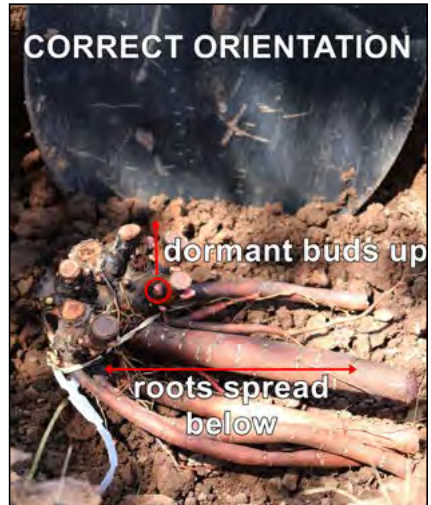
**Choose your peony's new home.** Your peony will need a sunny location with well-drained soil. Peonies in warmer climates may benefit from dappled shade. To test drainage, dig a 1-foot deep by 1-foot wide hole, fill with water, and record the time it takes for the water to completely drain. The optimal time is between 10 and 30 minutes. Drainage that takes less than 10 minutes translates to poor growing conditions. Foundations, downspouts, and roof driplines are areas that could retain too much water.

**Give your peony plenty of space.** Three feet on center is a starting point. The old-fashioned peonies

“like grandma had” (lactifloras) may need a little more room. Compact peonies may require slightly less space. Good air circulation will be your friend, helping to prevent diseases. Remove any grass or other plant competition inside the 3-foot circle. Tree root systems can also hinder peony health.

**Prepare soil ahead of time.** Have your soil tested and follow any recommendations. Your local extension office can help you. Be careful when adding random amendments to the soil. For example, I see social media advice that promotes the benefit of adding substances like lime. Peonies prefer a neutral pH of 6.5-7.0. Lime raises the pH. My soil has a pH of 7.5. Adding lime would be a bad choice for me. If you have a lower pH, lime may be a benefit.

When receiving advice, always confirm it with local experts who are familiar with your soil attributes, university research data, or specialized peony sources. Choosing social media advice over the correct advice of experts can be disastrous. Know the reason why you are adding an amendment and what will happen. When adding professionally recom-



mended amendments, extend the amendment past the planting area to allow for mature roots.

**Unpack and prep your peony root.** Unpack and examine the root. Remove any mold, damaged, or mushy parts that may have occurred during shipping. Some roots may be packed in peat moss, woodchips, or forest moss. Remove the packing medium. *Do not plant the packing medium with your roots.* The packing medium will hold moisture to the roots and we don't

want that in the growing environment.

**Dig the hole and position your peony.** When planting the roots, start by digging a hole about 1-foot wide by 1-foot deep. If you received generous roots, dig a larger hole. Position the root so the eyes (pink or white buds) (sprouts) are pointing upward. It is okay if the eyes are not sticking straight up at a 90-degree angle. Various angles are acceptable. Cover the eyes with ½ to 2-inches of soil depending on your





zone. Plant  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch deep in warmer zones and up to 2-inches deep in cold zones.

Some roots may need to be planted at an angle or horizontally to assure the eyes are  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 2-inches deep and all the roots are under the soil line. I have seen photos of novice gardeners with exposed roots in the air to get the eyes at the recommended depth. Again, all the roots need to be below the soil line.

Peonies planted too deeply may not bloom and peonies planted too shallowly may freeze or dry out. Press down on the soil to remove

air pockets. Lift or sink if needed to the recommended depth. Check the depth after a thorough watering.

**Monitor the site.** Keep plants hydrated until frost. Daily watering is unnecessary and may lead to root rot or frozen roots. In cold climates, it is okay to cover newly planted area with mulch to prevent frost heaves the first year only. *Remove the mulch in the Spring.*

For additional information, check out the APS website: <https://americanpeonysociety.org/> and click “learn.”

## Duluth Peony Society

Don Kienholz and Elizabeth Donley, Chairs -  
[www.facebook.com/duluthpeonysociety](http://www.facebook.com/duluthpeonysociety)

Despite a very wet spring and some major botrytis damage, Duluth had a very beautiful and extraordinary bloom season. As I write this on July 3, we have many peonies in bloom with some still to come. **'Duluth,'** a wonderful white double, is starting to open today.

The Duluth Peony Society hosted our annual day in the park to start off Duluth Peony Show week on June 25th. A good number of blooms were open. Some years we have none that third week in June. Folks enjoyed conversations, the selfie peony frame, and the blooms.

The next day was the first day of the formal Duluth Peony Show at Longview Tennis Club. Both are historical traditions of Duluth, about 110 years old. Many blooms were entered and enjoyed. In fact, the American Peony Society annual show was held in Duluth for many years in the early 1920s.

The results for the “favorite bloom” contest were: in third place, **'Garden Treasure'**; tied for second place, **'Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt'** and **'Pink Parfait'**; and tied for first place in a close race, “Shimane Chōjura-ku” and **'Princess Margaret'**.

It is always a great week of peony adoration and peace. 🇺🇸





# Mid Atlantic Peony Society

Bernie Miller - midatlanticpeony.org

The Mid-Atlantic Peony Society had a very busy month of May because a major part of our bloom season falls at that time. We had good rainfall and warmer than usual temperatures, so the tree peonies started to bloom earlier than in previous years, but the blooms were spectacular. The herbaceous season started out warm and then had a cool down period which allowed us to hold on to some blooms longer.

The kickoff to our season was our annual woody peony tour at the Scott Arboretum. We vary the date each year so we can catch different varieties in bloom. We lost count after fifty people arrived for the free tour. After the tour the membership provided refreshments and opportunities to join the society.

In rapid succession we had an open house at Brandimore Specialties (a peony farm), a tour of a formal garden designed in 1930, and a combination tour at Eleanor's Peonies (a peony nursery) including a "make it, take it" bud vase event and a home cooked dinner. We were pleased with the attendance at each event.

Our big event was the Peony Palooza, co-planned with the Scott Arboretum, and held over three days at Swarthmore College. The first day was to drop-off entries and for judging. Day two was a flower arranging challenge where participants were given the same peonies, containers, greens, and other flowers. That afternoon peony blooms were donated to the Scott Arboretum, where a flower arranging program was held for children. Attendance at this event was doubled compared to last year. The children could have their arrangements judged and they could participate in a peony scavenger hunt.

Our executive committee and several members ran the event for the days the Palooza was open to the public. We added a selfie station - an arbor decorated with fresh flowers and lots of peonies - because we saw how many photos were taken the first year. Attendance increased ten percent from last year and the event was a successful membership recruitment tool.

Our representation at the American Peony Society (APS) National Convention in June increased this year; we also took notes on how the con-

vention was run. Earlier on, we showed an interest in hosting a future convention in our region. We were told at the APS Board meeting that the 2026 convention would be held in the Mid-Atlantic region. We were pleased by the decision and have brought the good news to our membership. We look forward to welcoming everyone. Stay tuned for more details 🌸



## Peony Society of Maine

Nita Stormann – President

Our May 14th dinner meeting held at the Penobscot County Conservation Association building along the Penobscot River in Brewer, was a success. Members and guests enjoyed a presentation titled, “What Inspires You to Create Your Individual Garden?” by Lynn Anderson, the society’s secretary. Member Kevin Tremblay of Labyrinthia Guest House in Ripley brought bouquets of perennials that were raffled off. Ken has permaculture, labyrinthian and selective weeding theme gardens.

On June 4th, a Bloom Work Party was held at Roger and Sally Lycette’s 300+ peony garden in Bangor. The Lycette’s garden has always been the starting point of our annual June Peony Garden Tour. Members and

friends came with tools. We were able to finish the weeding in preparation for the June 8th tour and enjoyed a potluck dinner.

Our 23rd annual Peony Garden Tour held June 8th and 15th included six host gardens in a 58 miles radius. Participants travelled to the Maine towns of Bangor, Winterport, Ripley, St Albans and Pittsfield. Member volunteers were present at each garden to share information and assist the host gardener. Two '**Bowl of Cream**' peonies, donated by member Allen Reynolds of Green Garden Farms in St Albans, were raffled off.

On June 12th, members were invited to James and Leila Day's coastal garden in Castine, where we were given a tour of the historical grounds and served refreshments. We finished the day visiting Dennis, Holly, and Julia Viollette's busy cut flower business, Painted Box Gardens, in Orrington. A July 14th members-only Garden Tea Party was hosted by Lynn and Harry Anderson in Winterport. Members were able to view creative giant wooden sculptures in their woodland garden.

Mitchell Blair, the University of Maine at Orono horticulture student and recipient of our \$500 renewable scholarship, finished his capstone project by landscaping the campus Counseling Center with peonies.

Our yearly member-only fundraising auction and dinner is scheduled for September 24th. Election of new officers will be held at that time. Demonstration workshops for members will be held in September and October. This is a great opportunity for new members to have hands-on experience digging, dividing, and planting roots. We will also be at the University of Maine Demonstration Garden's Field Days on September 7th, where peony society members who are Master Gardeners maintain three peony plots. We will again give away peony plants to non-profit organizations throughout the state of Maine under the direction of member Anne Mundy. We will end the year with a December 3rd dinner meeting and speaker event.

A special thanks goes to our media specialist and member, Julianne Sawyer, who has updated our website ([www.peonysocietyofmaine.net](http://www.peonysocietyofmaine.net)), taken over our newsletter, designed new promotional materials, and more.

2025 is our 25th anniversary and a committee has been formed to plan the celebration during the peak peony season. What a great 2024 peony season in Maine. 🌸

## Wisconsin Peony Society

Michelle Ovans, President - [ovanspeonyfarm@yahoo.com](mailto:ovanspeonyfarm@yahoo.com)

What a blooming season we had in Wisconsin! Although we experienced extreme weather conditions this year, Mother Nature blessed us with abundance in peony blooms. The spirit of enduring growth inspired us as we toured members' gardens during our Spring Picnic.

The Hoard Museum in Fort Atkinson hosted the State of Wisconsin Office of the Governors Proclamation, naming June 1st the "Intersectional Peony City" Day. The City of Fort Atkinson is the home of the largest public intersectional hybrid peony garden in North America, displaying 54 of Roger F. Anderson's intersectional hybrids. Wisconsin has a rich history involving peonies; we look forward to sharing that with all of you during the American Peony Society Annual Convention in 2025.

Plans are well underway as we focus our attention to the National Flower Show, events, and seminars. Attendees will be hosted at Wayland Academy located on the 55-acre campus in Beaver Dam, which is just 40 miles from Madison, 60 miles from Milwaukee, and 150 miles from Chicago. The National Flower Show will be just a few blocks away at the Beaver Dam High School. We want to touch people more deeply by providing more than "just a place to stay." In this peaceful environs, ordinary cares fade away, and artful endeavors refresh the spirit as we discover kinship and joy while learning and sharing our love for the heritage and charm of peonies. 🌸

## Prairie Peony Society

Myra Froc, President - [facebook.com/prairiepeonysociety](https://facebook.com/prairiepeonysociety)

What a year it has been for the Prairie Peony Society (PPS) as we celebrated our 25th anniversary on June 22-23 in Regina, Saskatchewan, in the heart of the Canadian prairies! 2024 began with some incredible informational webinars for our membership, and planning began in earnest as the board met through last fall and winter to put the essential pieces together. Realizing that we did not have enough volunteers to build an anniversary show, we took to the phone lines to engage our members. And magically, it all came together, especially when it became clear that it was no longer a question of what the society could

do for its members, but an affirmation of what members could do to ensure not only the survival of their peony society for the rest of the year, but also its continued growth into the next twenty-five.

To put the icing on the anniversary cake, we were honored by the presence of founding



members and guests from the Canadian prairies and the U.S. Of special significance was the attendance of officers of the American Peony Society, Past-President Nate Bremer, and International Registrar Jordan Kabat, who endeared themselves to PPS members and local media with their expertise, assistance, and wit.

The celebration continues for the rest of the year as we put on root sales, host a volunteer appreciation dinner at the Floral Conservatory of Regina, and sort out large group orders in the fall. We have learned that if you build a field of dreams, peony lovers far and wide will certainly come. 🍁



# Pacific Northwest Peony Society

Steve Smith, President – [pnwpeony@gmail.com](mailto:pnwpeony@gmail.com)

This spring, thanks to cooler weather extending the bloom season, many of us enjoyed an unusually long period of beautiful flowers in the Pacific Northwest. Despite no garden tours this season, we actively engaged with the public to promote peonies. We conducted three informative presentations for garden enthusiasts this spring.



The first presentation took place at "Gardening for Everyone," a full-day event hosted by the Lewis County Master Gardeners. I introduced peonies to an audience of over 25 attendees.

During the Spring Garden Fair in Canby, OR, held the weekend of May 4th, Lore Sampson (former APS President) and Jim Sampson provided an informative display about peonies for the attendees.

In May, at Closed Loop Park in Lacey, WA, the Thurston County Master Gardeners organized an event where I also spoke, and participants learned about growing peonies from seed and received packets of their own packets of seeds.

Later in the season, members of the Pierce County Master Gardeners Propagators group visited our personal garden for a tour and to hear about growing peonies from seed.

We loved these opportunities to connect with fellow gardeners and community groups and eagerly anticipate future presentations and look forward to welcoming new members into the society.

Our fall meeting is scheduled for November 16th at Christianson's Nursery in Mount Vernon, WA, with a public peony talk on Friday, November 15th. More details will be available on our website by the end of summer. 🍷



# Minnesota Peony Society

Mary Schwartzbauer, President – [mnpeony.org](http://mnpeony.org)

The Minnesota Peony Society extends a great big thank you to everyone who attended the American Peony Society (APS) National Convention in Bloomington, MN, in June. We hope you all had a good time! We had a great time being your host and the weather cooperated. Final numbers are not in at the time of this writing; however, we enjoyed a good auction, and everyone seemed to really get into the spirit of it all.

The garden tours were spectacular. Timing was great, as many peonies were in bloom for us! The bus ride on one day was a little long, but judging by all the chatter on my bus, I would say people did not really mind and hopefully everyone got to know a few new peony friends.

We will be having our own Minnesota Peony Society Auction on Sunday, September 29, at Bachman's on Lyndale Avenue. If any of you are in the neighborhood, please feel free to stop by! It is always a fun time and you may go away with that perfect peony you have been looking for!

But we've been deluged with rain, so I'll skip that. Enjoy your gardens. 🌸

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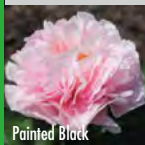
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**'White Innocence'** (Saunders, 1947)  
Photo courtesy Steve Smith