



## Tree Peonies

Patience is required to grow these plants. First flowers may not be true to size or colour, but do not be disappointed, allow one or two seasons to develop. Once they start to bloom, the exotic flower is so rewarding. Tree Peonies grow for many years and if cared for will bloom annually. Flowering is from October to early December. They are deciduous plants leaving a woody framework during winter.

### Climate and Situation

Tree Peonies prefer a sunny aspect but will grow in partial shade. Some shade from the midday sun and shelter from heavy wind is desirable. They require 4 - 6 hours of direct sunlight daily.

### Soil and Planting

Dig a large hole a minimum of 45cm x 45cm. Poor drainage is one of the few problems which kill Peonies, therefore ensure that water in the bottom of the hole can drain away. Fill the bottom half of the hole with good heavy soil mixed with well rotted compost (fresh manure will burn the roots). If this isn't available, two handfuls of super-phosphate and two of blood and bone can be used. Stamp down the soil and then fill the remainder with good topsoil.

If planting in heavy clay soils do not mix with sand for drainage, as this sets like concrete in summer. Loamy humus rich soil with a pH of 6.5 to 7 is required. Dolomite lime can be added to the soil to ensure the pH levels are correct.

It is strongly recommended that the plant be left in its pot until the following April, otherwise you risk the potting mix collapsing when knocked out of the pot, thus rupturing the newly formed fibrous roots with possibly fatal results.

Prepare the hole, bury the pot with the plant in it - to the very top of the pot - water as you would any other shrub and then next April knock it out of the pot and plant to the same level.

### Watering and Feeding

Remember that too much water can be detrimental to the plant. Water regularly in dry periods, but ensure adequate drainage is available. Once established they are virtually drought resistant. Peonies require slightly acid soil.

Fertilise 2 - 3 times annually, first in late Winter to early Spring (when the leaves start to form) giving a light feed with manure/mulch but not in direct contact with stems or branches. Add 1 teaspoon of 1 - 3 month Osmicote or Rose Food and in acidic soils, add dolomite lime. Repeat again after blooming (around Christmas) and then give its heaviest feed in early Autumn. It helps to have a pH test kit to know if and how much lime to feed the Peony.

