



Peony Problems

Peonies are one of the most popular and hardy perennials, admired for their large fragrant blooms. Peonies perform best in full sun with well-drained soil. They also have a few peculiarities that may present some problems. Fortunately, these problems are relatively easy to remedy.

Plants that fail to set flower buds-if you have a healthy-looking plant, this is most likely due to one or more of the following problems.

It's planted at the wrong depth. Peonies are fussy about planting depth. Depth is the distance between the eyes (pinkish buds just above the crown when the plant is dormant) and the surface of the soil. If the eyes are planted too deep, flower buds may not form. If they are too shallow, they may be killed by cold. When planting, cover the eyes with one to one and a half inches of soil. Cover lightly as to not break the eyes.

The peony doesn't get enough sun. Peonies will survive in partial shade, but it will be much happier and have more flowers if given eight or more hours of direct sunlight.

The plant is too young. Peonies bloom very little, if at all, in the first year or two after they are planted.

The plant is too crowded. When peonies have to compete for room to grow, they may not bloom. They like to have elbow room.

The plant is getting too much nitrogen. Peonies should be fertilized with a low nitrogen fertilizer. When they are over-fertilized or are planted too close to a lawn that gets a high nitrogen fertilizer, they tend to have a lot of lush green foliage, and very few blooms.

The plant was transplanted or divided recently. Peonies dislike being disturbed and can take time (even years) to recover once they are established.

Plants that set buds that don't produce healthy flowers-when a peony starts to form buds and they don't fully open, it's usually due to an insect or disease problem.

Botrytis is a fungal disease that can destroy a flower bud as it develops. It thrives in humid conditions. To avoid botrytis, plant your peony in an area that receives a lot of sun and good

air circulation. Botrytis affects the buds often, but can also affect the rest of the plant. Once you notice the disease, it is too late to save the flower buds. Remove the diseased buds and dispose of. Treat the whole plant with a fungicide.

Extreme temperatures can kill the developing buds. This isn't a common problem here in our area, but isn't completely out of the question.

Too much or too little water while the buds are developing can cause them to wilt and die. Keep the soil evenly moist, be sure the soil is well-drained.

Flowers that open and are damaged

Thrips will cause streaks or brown areas on a flower petal if they were able to attack the bud. To check for thrips, crumble the damaged flower onto a piece of clean white paper. Thrips are very tiny insects that are usually yellow (but not always). When they fall from the flower to the paper, they will look like tiny moving dash marks. The flower can't be saved, but use a systemic insecticide labeled for thrips on the plant.

Chafers are beetles that sometimes eat the flower bud. They can be handpicked or killed with an insecticide.

Botrytis can coat a newly opened bloom with fuzzy grey growth. Remove the infected parts of the plant and discard. Make sure the plant is receiving proper sun exposure and air circulation.

Stems often break and fall over if they receive strong winds or rain. Using a peony hoop will help plants that have large blooms and are more prone to flopping. Plants that have received too much fertilizer may have weaker stems.