

Over the years I've discovered if one were to ask a veteran gardener what his or her favorite flower is, the answer would not always be the same. Quite often the response would be dependent on what particular flower is blooming in the landscape. As a long time gardener, such a scenario would have fit my persona; however, that has changed. Although I love all flowers, I am convinced I do have a single favorite. No matter if and when asked such a question, I am reasonably certain my response would remain the same. My choice of favorite flower belongs to the genus *Paeonia* and particularly Intersectional Itoh with the name 'Bartzella'.

About four years ago I was introduced to this flower. In May of 2010, Rita and I traveled to Tilden, Nebraska, to celebrate Mother's Day with Rita's mother and father. Whenever we're out on the road in the spring of the year, our car routinely stops at every greenhouse and nursery we encounter. On our way home, we stopped by a small garden center in Neligh, Nebraska.

Upon entering the store, I was instantly drawn to a large potted plant covered with numerous huge flower buds and one amazing, huge, yellow flower. Thirty minutes later, back on the road, I was mentally preparing a planting sight in our landscape for my newly purchased Intersectional Itoh.



Since that day, and every spring thereafter, this plant has graced our yard with its amazing beauty. Seven-to-eight inch large, bright yellow double blossoms stand above the lush, dark green, deeply dissected foliage. Each flower has a pleasant, slightly spicy scent. Furthermore, the flowers are perched upon a vigorous plant and require no staking.

'Bartzella' is an intersectional Itoh peony. Itohs are hybrids produced by crossing a tree peony with an herbaceous peony. Hybrids attempt to capture the

best characteristics of both parents. Frost destroys herbaceous peonies at the end of the growing season, and the tops die back completely to the ground. The crown of the plant, however, remains viable. Next year's growth originates from below the ground at growing points called eyes. A tree peony produces a woody stem. In autumn, tree peonies, like other woody stemmed shrubs, lose their leaves. Their woody stems go dormant but remain alive. Next year's growth originates from the buds which develop on the woody stems.

Intersectional peonies produce large tree peony type flowers on plants that behave like herbaceous peonies. A mature plant may produce fifty or more dinner



plate-sized flowers on strong stems that do not require staking. They reach peak bloom near the end of the herbaceous peony bloom. Each plant can remain in bloom for 2-3 weeks with new buds continually opening over this period. They can be used as cut flowers and offer

an astounding array of yellows and golds -- colors not widely available in herbaceous peonies. Intersectionals are disease resistant, less susceptible to powdery mildew than their herbaceous parent and less susceptible to botrytis blight than their tree peony parent. Intersectional peonies grow to approximately two and one-half feet tall by about three feet wide.

Our beautiful 'Bartzella' is once again in full bloom, capturing the undivided attention of those who gaze upon it. Sadly, in a week or two, these magnificent, huge, fragrant yellow flowers will fade into memory, but I can assure you they will

not be forgotten. 'Bartzella' is my favorite flower and will continue, long after it has stopped blooming. Perhaps someday plant breeders will develop Intersectional Itoh to bloom continuously throughout the growing season rather than just in spring. If and when that happens, I'm convinced they will become my favorite flower.

