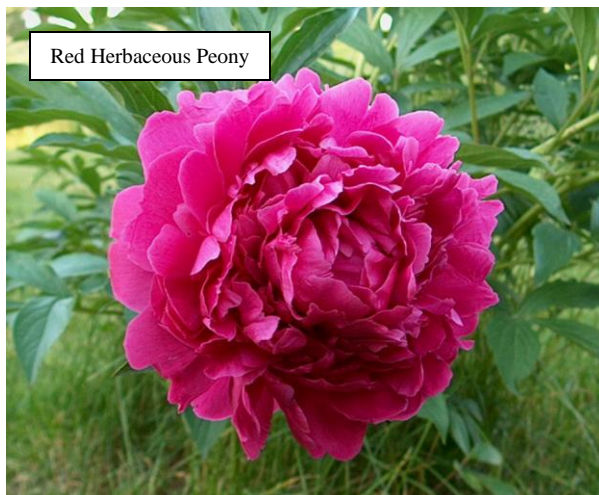


Memorial Day is eight days away. I have always thought that peonies and Memorial Day went hand in hand. My rationale for such a statement is Memorial Day generally coincides with blooming peonies.

Throughout my youth, it was tradition to help Mother cut peonies the night before Memorial Day. The following morning at daybreak, off we'd go to the cemetery with vases of freshly cut peonies to decorate the graves of our departed love ones. Perhaps, that might be the reason I love peonies. Let me clarify. It was not that I experienced joy while visiting the gravesites of my deceased relatives; rather, it was because I enjoyed helping Mother. Mother had a passion for flowers. Peonies were among her favorites. Her passion for these spring beauties was contagious.



I am convinced that anyone who closely examines a peony flower will surely be captured by its exquisite beauty. Not only are these huge, colorful blossoms a sight to behold, but their fragrance is intoxicating. Mother grew only herbaceous peonies — those with soft stems that die back to the ground each winter and re-grow and re-bloom the following spring. With good

weather, herbaceous peonies bloom for about two weeks. The plant is long-lived; however, its flower is somewhat fragile. If we experience a windy, heavy spring rain, these magnificent beauties can easily end up shattered, lying on the ground. In spite of this weakness, Rita and I have a number of herbaceous peonies growing in our landscape. Many are from Mother's very own garden.



Today, my passion for peonies has expanded. Rita and I not only grow herbaceous peonies, but we also grow tree peonies and an intersectional peony.

I'd like to share a story regarding our most recently acquired tree peony. Nearly twenty years ago, I first noticed a particular tree peony blooming in a nearby neighbor's yard. Each year, when in bloom, I made it a point to take a stroll around the neighborhood just to catch a glimpse of this beauty. For years the home was owner-occupied, but a few years ago, it sold and became a rental property.

Last fall, while walking by the home, I noticed the entire plant had been cut to the ground. I was devastated. Tree peonies are not to be cut back. They grow on a woody stem, and like a



typical woody-stemmed shrub, each year they add to their length. I was convinced the plant was dead. Much to my surprise, it reappeared early in March.

I directly called the owner of the property and asked if I could buy the plant. The owner graciously said it was mine for the taking. Immediately, with shovels in hand, Rita and I started digging. By the way, peonies are best transplanted in the autumn; but in this

case, we had no choice. As a result, I think we took half of Minden with the root ball just to insure its success. Upon lifting, we immediately transplanted the peony to our yard. Making sure it was well cared for and thanks to the unseasonably warm weather in March and April, the transplant went well. As if saying thank you, the plant even rewarded us with one beautiful pink blossom in mid-April. Needless to say, I am thrilled, and I can't wait until next spring.



Intersectional Peony

An intersectional peony is a hybrid. It is the result of crossing an herbaceous peony with a tree peony. It, like an herbaceous peony, is cut back in the fall. Ours began blooming just a week ago. Huge, beautiful, fragrant yellow flowers grace this plant.

Interestingly, all three types of peonies form next year's buds in the fall. Tree peonies form their buds on the above ground stems; whereas, herbaceous and intersectional peonies form their buds on the underground crown of the plant.

I hate to say it, but it looks like there will be few, if any, peonies for Memorial Day. Our tree peony bloomed over a month ago. Our herbaceous peonies are drawing to a close. My only hope is the intersectional. Will it still be blooming on Memorial Day?

Traditions change. Today, rather than decorating graves with peonies and other freshly cut flowers, the trend now seems to be to use artificial flowers and wreaths. Although Mother is no longer with us in person, she is always in my heart. For Memorial Day, I can assure you, we will be placing real flowers on her grave. With any luck at all, they might even be peonies — intersectional that is.