

Yard and Garden – 03-10-2018 Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

Do you remember the Ketchup Song? In the late 70s, Heinz ketchup made a series of popular commercials where a cute little kid would often be shown waiting for the ketchup to come slowly out of the bottle as the chorus of the song “Anticipation” by Carly Simon played in the background.

Spring is quickly approaching and for the past few days, that chorus has been resonating in my head. Ever since March arrived, one can readily find me slowly walking through my backyard scrutinizing our flower borders. The fact is I have been anticipating the appearance of certain buds bursting with promise for the season. However, like that famous ketchup song, all this anticipation is making me wait!



My anticipation story actually began in 2009. That spring, Rita and I spent a day visiting the Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha, Nebraska. It was there an awe-inspiring collection of blooming Chinese and Japanese peonies captivated me. By the end of that season, I had purchased and planted three such plants in our backyard, and by the spring of 2012, they started blooming. Then, I embarked on a project I knew would take time — a lot of time!

In the summer of 2012, I ordered tree peony seeds from Cricket Hill Gardens, a peony farm located in

Thomaston, Connecticut. When the seeds arrived in late August, I immediately planted them together in a ten-inch flowerpot. After planting, I buried the flowerpot in the soil of our rose garden, leaving just the rim of the pot exposed. For two years, I watered and cared for the pot. Finally, in the spring of 2014, the first seedlings began to emerge. By the end of that spring,

seven tiny seedlings were growing in the pot. That first year, the seedlings reached a height of two inches. I allowed the seedlings to remain growing collectively in the pot until October, 2015. By that time, they each had reached a height of about five inches. It was then I lifted the flowerpot and divided the plants, placing each seedling into its own individual flowerpot. (Note: I have attached a composite photo of dividing the seedlings and placing them in their own pots.)



In October, 2015, I first wrote about my anticipation for what will someday be what I will call Heaven's Hybrids. Interestingly, I am still eagerly awaiting these special hybrids.

In the fall of 2015, before the ground froze, I buried each individual pot up to its rim in the soil at the edge our vegetable garden. There, I cared for each potted plant until the spring of 2017. Then, I lifted each potted plant and transplanted the individual plants to their permanent location in our landscape. Last fall, Rita mulched each plant, and now I anxiously anticipate seeing viable buds emerge from these young plants.

Earlier I referenced anticipating the arrival of Heavens Hybrids. Like many plants grown from seed, due to cross-pollination, future flowers produced on these hybrids will not likely resemble the flowers of their parents. Of course they will be tree peony flowers, but what color, what size — only heaven holds the answer. When they do bloom, I can assure you each will be a tree peony flower that the world has never seen —each having the potential to astonish viewers for years to come.

When my little tree peonies finally begin to bloom, I know I am in for a big surprise. Some might ask, "Why go through all this work by starting tree peonies from seed?" The fact is, I love the challenge. Furthermore, the anticipation is making me wait, and like the Heinz ketchup song states, "The results should be slow good!"

