

Yard and Garden - 10-17-2015- Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

When you least expect it, along comes a learning experience that blossoms into a passion. That passion for me was ignited in May, 2009, when Rita and I visited Omaha's renowned Lauritzen Gardens. It was there I was captivated by the beauty



of an awesome collection of blooming Chinese and Japanese tree peonies. Prior to that day, I knew little about tree peonies and had seen only a few. A few days later, I purchased two potted tree peonies, and by the spring of 2012, both were blooming beautifully in our yard. In August, 2012, my passion resulted in a project that I knew would take time and

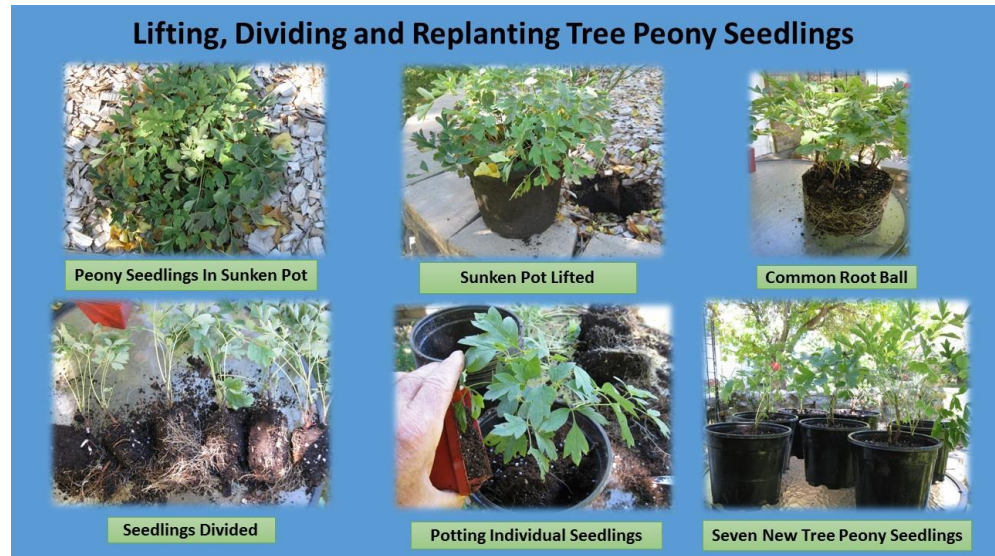
patience —growing tree peonies from seed.



That summer I ordered tree peony seeds from Cricket Hill Gardens, a peony farm located in Thomaston, Connecticut, and when they arrived in late August, I immediately planted them together in a ten-inch flower pot filled with potting soil. I buried the flower pot in the soil of our rose garden, leaving just the rim of the pot exposed. While there, I cared for the pot by watering when needed and mulching through the winter. Prior to planting, I had read not to despair, for it often takes up to two years for tree peony seeds to germinate. So very true. It wasn't until the spring of 2014 the first seedlings began to emerge. By the end of that spring, I had

seven tiny seedlings growing in the pot. That first year they reached a height of about two inches. I allowed them to remain in the pot through the following winter and throughout the entire growing season of 2015. By September of 2015, the seedlings had reached a height of about six inches. I knew then it was time to lift, divide and replant.

As shown in my photos, I recently lifted the pot of young tree peony plants from the soil, divided them, and planted each in a pot of its own. I am now caring for them, and soon,



before the ground freezes, I will bury each pot up to its rim in our garden. In late November, I will mulch them to ward off the ravages of winter. By the spring of 2016, I hope to see seven seedlings alive and re-growing. Then, I plan to lift the pots from the soil and care for them as any other potted plant throughout the summer of 2016. Finally, in the fall of 2016, assuming they are still alive, I will plant each in our flower borders where they will take their permanent residence. Hopefully, in the spring of 2017 or 2018, each will be blooming.

You might recall that on August 18, 2012, I wrote about beginning this project. In that article I stated that each tree peony seed resembled a tiny pearl. I was thrilled then and I'm still thrilled now, just knowing that within each lustrous pearl is the beginning of a tree peony, one the world has never before seen in bloom— each having the potential to astonish spectators for years to come.

It's not uncommon that a tree peony grown from seed may not resemble the parent plant's flower, due to cross pollination. Cricket Hill calls these offspring plants, *Heaven's Hybrids*. Since I have no idea what the parent plant's flower looked like, I'm in for a big surprise.

One might ask, why go through all this work by starting tree peonies from seed? Who wants to wait five or six years to witness the first flower? Surely, it is easier to purchase established plants.

The fact is, I love the challenge. As I stated earlier, all it takes is time and patience— and a little help from heaven. I know the reward will be worth it!