**PEONY**

*Paeonia officinalis*
[pay-OHN-ee-uh oh-fiss-ih-NAH-liss]

**Family:** Paeoniaceae

**Names:** Common Peony, Mu Shao Yao, Paeony, Peonia, Sakayik, Yoshu-Syakuyaku, Pivoine (French); Echte Pfingstrose, Paonie (German); Peonia (Italian); Peonia (Spanish)

**Description:** Perennial growing to 2 feet. Has a tuberous root, upright stems, oval to lance-shaped leaflets, and attractive large red, red-purple, or white flowers. It is hardy to zone 8. It is in flower in May, and the seeds ripen in July. The flowers are hermaphrodite and are pollinated by insects. The plant is self-fertile.

**Cultivation:** Peony is native to southern Europe and the Mediterranean region. It is found in mountain woodlands and is widely cultivated as a garden plant. Requires a deep rich soil, preferably neutral or slightly alkaline, doing quite well in sun or light shade. Plants are tolerant of a wide range of soil conditions, but will not survive if the soil becomes waterlogged or is too dry. This species is lime tolerant. Plants grown on sandy soils tend to produce more leaves and less flowers, whilst those growing on clay take longer to become established but produce better blooms. Plants can be naturalized in grass so long as the soil is good. Hardy to about 7°F. A very variable plant, there are at least 4 sub-species. There are a number of named forms, selected for their ornamental value. A long-lived plant, living for 50 years or more in gardens. Members of this genus are rarely if ever troubled by browsing deer or rabbits. A very greedy plant inhibiting the growth of nearby plants, especially legumes. This species can spread fairly freely by means of its tuberous rootstock. Strongly resents root disturbance, taking some time to recover after being divided. Peony species are usually self-fertile, though they will also hybridize with other species if these flower nearby at the same time. Plants take 4 - 5 years to flower from seed. They generally breed true from seed.

Seed is best sown as soon as it is ripe in a cold frame. When sown fresh, the seed produces a root about 6 weeks after sowing with shoots formed in the spring. Stored seed is much slower, it should be sown as soon as possible in a cold frame but may take 18 months or more to germinate. The roots are
very sensitive to disturbance, so many growers allow the seedlings to remain in their pots for 2 growing seasons before potting them up. This allows a better root system to develop that is more resilient to disturbance. If following this practice, make sure you sow the seed thinly, and give regular liquid feeds in the growing season to ensure the plants are well fed. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots as soon as they are large enough to handle, and then grow them on in a cold frame for at least two growing seasons before planting them out when they are in growth in the spring. Division with great care in spring or autumn. Each portion must have a leaf bud. If the lifted root is stood in shade for several hours it becomes less brittle and easier to divide. Divisions that have several buds will usually flower in the second year, but those that only have one or two buds will take a number of years before they have grown sufficiently to flower. The root is harvested in the autumn from plants that are at least two years old and is dried for later use. The plucked red petals should be dried quickly so that do not fade. The drug must be protected from light when stored. When fresh it has a faint honey smell, lost when it is dried, and a harsh sweet taste with an astringent effect.

**History:** Since the time of Hippocrates, peony has been used to treat epilepsy. Inb el Beitar, a medieval Arab physician, recommended a necklace of peony seeds to ward off epilepsy in children. The Greek physician Dioscorides wrote that the root provokes menstruation and may be used to expel the placenta after childbirth. In ancient times, peony was thought to be of divine origin, an emanation from the moon, and to shine during the night protecting the shepherds and their flocks. The name, derived from the Greek as Paeon, means physician to the gods. There are some who believe that the Paeon is derived from an earlier version of Pan which makes a connection with the horned god. It was also believed that the peony is named after the mythological physician Paeos, who provided healing and herbal medication for the gods injured during the Trojan War. Folklore cautions about letting a woodpecker see you harvest peony, warning that to do so could cost you your sight. It was believed that peony should be harvested beneath a waxing Moon. Language of Flowers: bashfulness.

**Constituents:** Peony is thought to contain paeonine, a volatile oil, tannins, and resin

**Properties:** Antispasmodic; Diuretic; Sedative; Tonic.

**Medicinal Uses:** Peony root has been used medicinally for over 2,000 years and it gained a reputation as a treatment for epilepsy and to promote menstruation. This species was very popular up to the 16th century, but is little used in contemporary European herbalism, though it is sometimes employed where an antispasmodic and sedative are required. The root may be employed to treat whooping cough and nervous irritation, and suppositories are sometimes made of the root to relieve anal and intestinal spasms. A tea made from the dried crushed petals of various peony species has been used as a cough remedy, and as a treatment for hemorrhoids and varicose veins.

**Toxicity:** The entire plant is poisonous if taken in large doses. Take peony only under professional supervision. Do not take during pregnancy. The flowers and seeds cause stomach and intestinal inflammation leading to vomiting, spasmodic pains and diarrhea if taken in excess.

**Ritual Uses:** Gender: Hot. Planet: Sun. Element: Fire. Associated Deities: Paeon, Apollo. Part Used: Herb. Basic Powers: Protection, Exorcism. Dry the root, or several roots, and make into a necklace or bracelet. The roots may be carved into attractive shapes. This is very protective. Use the root in breaking any enchantment by hanging it around the neck of the enchanted one. Burn the seeds during exorcism rituals. Hang up the root or burn it to stop storms. Peony seeds are magickal. They can be harvested and dried while sitting directly in the light of a full Moon,
then treaded upon a white thread and worn as a necklace to bring protection against all forms of negative energy. Peony roots are considered powerful. The roots may be harvested and cleaned. Slice them into small circlelets while fresh, then dry. These may be threaded into a necklace as well. It is often easier to pierce them with a thick needle before they have dried. The whole root may be carved into a talisman.

At one time beads for rosaries made of peony root were popular among Christians, and they were believed to be more holy than other materials. Peony is associated with the magick of the Moon, although it is ruled by the Sun. It is some cultures it is believed that the first peony was a gift to humankind by the Moon goddess, to reflect her light and love to guide us through the fears and darkness of night. Peony may be used magickally to protect one against all forms of darkness. In medieval times it was used with verbena to promote magickal healing.

Peony is allegedly a plant of divine origin formed from moonbeams. It’s associated with the divine healer, Asklepios. Fashion a necklace from peony roots and have the patient wear it around his or her neck. This allegedly wards off illness and evil and is also beneficial for soothing, preventing or minimizing seizure disorders.

**Nightmare Spell:** Twist peony roots together, forming a chain long enough to wear as a necklace and tie your goals and desires into any knots. Allegedly this prevents nightmares or minimizes their impact.

**Nightmare Spell:** Slice dried peony roots; as you cut each slice, visualize the abrupt, final termination of the nightmare, never to return again. Pierce each slice with a needle, forming rough beads and string these onto red cord. Incorporate visualization and knot magic as appropriate to your situation. Wear this necklace as a protective shield and nightmare repellent.

**Culinary Uses:** Flowers can be used as a vegetable or to scent tea. The hot seeds are ground into a powder and used as a spice in ale or in the food that accompanies it. The seeds are used as tea by the Mongolians, and they make the roots into broth. The kernels are eaten as a condiment, and were used in cooking to decorate creams in the same way as sliced almonds.

**Recipes**

**Syrup of Peony flowers**

Take of fresh peony flowers 1 pound, infuse them in 3 pints of hot water for the space of 12 hours, then let them boil a little and press them out, adding the like quantity of fresh flowers and use as the former up to 5 times, then add to the infusion 2 ½ pounds of loaf sugar na dboil to a syrup.

**Peony Water**

Take of Peony flowers 1 ½ lbs, Spanish wine, 12 pints. Infuse the petals in the wine for 24 hours, then distill them in an alembic. Draw out 3 pints of strong water. Sweeten with sugar and keep for use.

**References:**


**Plants for a Future Database**