

# The Archibald Archive – Genus Guides

## PAEONIA

We list an expanding range of fresh seed collected both from cultivated plants raised from seed of known wild origin and from natural populations. This supremely beautiful, small genus of about 20 species of tuberous-rooted, herbaceous and shrubby perennials, in Ranunculaceae, is distributed sporadically across Europe and N Asia, with two disjunct species in western North America. While we should like to be able to make a complete range of seed available regularly every year, peony-enthusiasts will appreciate, that wild-collections are all too often unpredictable and unique opportunities. Most species are extremely local in nature, occurring, sometimes in very large numbers, in isolated colonies. It can be a lot of trouble to arrange to collect seed from them, especially as the anarchic situation in many parts of the former USSR compounds both the difficulties of collection and the unreliability of communication and transport. Our thanks go to Will McLewin for his painstaking efforts to continue collaboration with the botanists in the republics of the former USSR, who have made some of these collections.

Even if sown promptly, fresh seed may not show leaf-growth for about 18 months. Dried seed can take longer. Like some lilies, peonies will germinate hypogeally, forming a root-system underground during the first cool period before sending up true leaves the following season. The first true leaves will appear in spring. Paeonia has the same growth-cycle as summer-dormant geophytes. Root growth becomes active as the weather cools in late summer. Though they may retain foliage in summer, plants are comparatively inactive during warm weather. It is important to keep seed-containers moist from late summer to late spring, when roots may be forming unseen underground. Always keep ungerminated seed. It is large enough to check that it is sound.

Nomenclature: We generally follow the names used in the standard floras, such as 'Flora Europaea', 'Flora of Turkey', 'The Jepson Manual', 'Flora of China' (Flora Online at <http://flora.huh.harvard.edu>), etc. but there is a vast divergence in taxonomic approach. Recent western accounts tend to 'lumping' whereas the Russian approach has been to extreme 'splitting'. We discriminate to some extent, favouring accounts such as the excellent 'Peonies of Greece' (W.T. Stearn and P.H. Davis, 1984) and dismissing the 'Flora Iranica' account, which is rubbish. As populations almost always occur in isolated, disjunct colonies, we tend to favour some 'splitting' ourselves. An even approach to naming in the genus as a whole would be welcome. A 'Kew Magazine Monograph' by Mike Sinnott is in the process of gestation. It may be some time in appearing but, as Mike is a regular visitor to our peonies, we can give every assurance that we can keep you informed of its progress.

Further information: Apart from the publications mentioned and, of course, 'A Study of the Genus Paeonia' by F.C. Stern (1946), which is now a sumptuous and outdated, extremely expensive collector's piece, we are unwilling to recommend any of the more popular recently published books, which tend to be more reliable for information on hybrids than the wild species. There is, however, a treasury of information in 'The genus Paeonia'. Josef J. Halda and James W. Waddick Timber Press 2004 ISBN 0-88192-612-4

[http://www.amazon.com/The-Genus-Paeonia-Josef-](http://www.amazon.com/The-Genus-Paeonia-Josef-Halda/dp/0881926124#reader_0881926124)

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