

“Peé-uh-nees”

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By Christina Lacie

Fall planting is around the corner and peonies prefer to be planted this side of October. But before we get into the basics of planting peonies, did you know that the peony, a symbol of beauty and remembrance and an age-old source of inspiration for Asian artists, poets and authors, is the star of its own Greek myth? Allow me to explain.

Paeon was a student of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine. One day, Paeon used a peony to heal a wound from which Pluto (the Greek ruler of the Underworld) suffered. Well, Asclepius, feeling upstaged by his student threatened to take matters into his own hands and retaliate against Paeon. Wait, the plot thickens. Pluto, hearing of the conflict between the two, saved Paeon's life by turning him into a peony (hence the genus name *Paeonia*). Frankly, there are far worse things to be changed into, but let's get back to Peony 101.

There are two basic types of peonies. The herbaceous variety is grown from tuberous roots and the tree peony is a deciduous shrub. Colors range primarily from reds to pinks to whites. The peony flower forms include: single, semi-double, double and anemone.

Peonies are best planted between September and October. Fall planted peonies develop better root systems as opposed to those planted in the spring. They love full sun and are long-lived, but loathe being dug up and moved, so choose the location WISELY. When planting the tuberous peony, it should be planted in well-worked soil so that the eye is no deeper than 1 ½ - 2 inches maximum. USE A RULER. If a peony tuber is planted too deep, you will have plenty of foliage, but SANS blooms. The opposite is true of the tree peony. Plant it deep, even below the level of the nursery container.

There is much more to the peony than meets the eye. Between the Greek myth and the adoration of the plant in many Asian cultures, the peony is simply remarkable. Once established, it requires little water and even less mulching. Add a touch of fertilizer before and after blooming and voilá, life-long beauty.