

Things You Should Know About Peony Shows

SHOW SCHEDULE EXPLAINED

The Show Schedule attempts to organize the blooms into logical classes based on flower colour and form, plant derivation (lactiflora, herbaceous hybrid, intersectional hybrid, tree peony classes), and experience and knowledge of the exhibitor. Different colours and forms may be combined depending on expected number of entries. By the same token they can be expanded at the discretion of the Show Committee should the number of entries warrant it. Examples of this are that anemone flowered forms are usually shown in the Japanese classes, and doubles and semi-doubles may be combined into one class.

Divisions

Divisions divide the show entries based on the experience of the exhibitor as well as on the number of plants they grow. You can show in a higher division if you wish.

- **Open** - Open to all entrants. Correct labelling is mandatory. Named varieties only.
- **Collector or Amateur** - Open to those who grow chiefly for pleasure, sell plants or flowers occasionally, and grow less than 200 plants. Correct labelling is encouraged.
- **Court of Honour** - Open to all exhibitors though all entries must be named varieties and correctly labelled. Judges will select any named winning variety from the entire show for consideration to the Court of Honour.
- **Canadian Varieties** - The CPS has included a division, open to all, which is restricted to named and registered Canadian-bred varieties.
- **Seedlings** - Open to all but restricted to include only unregistered seedlings. This provides an opportunity for the peony breeders to display the fruits of their efforts and to compare these to existing varieties in the show.
- **Grand Champion** - Not strictly a division but it represents the best flower of all named entries in the show. In practice the Grand Champion is selected from the Court of Honour winners since these have already been deemed the best in their respective classes.

Classes

Divisions are divided into classes. It is important to read the show schedule carefully to ensure that you come prepared to enter your blooms in the appropriate class. Classes are determined based on a number of factors, the major ones of which are described below.

- **Taxonomic Derivation**

In the early part of the twentieth century there were lactifloras, tree peonies (which were shown as a collection, if at all), and species and species hybrids grouped as a single class. By 1936, at the APS show in Toronto, the lactifloras still dominated. There was one tree peony class consisting of a collection (no entries in 1936) and one species and hybrids class again as a collection and again without entries. Today there are several classes based on taxonomy.

Lactiflora - These are the so called common garden peonies and include varieties bred from other lactifloras.

Hybrids - Peonies derived from crossing two or more species. These tend to bloom earlier than the lactifloras and have a wider colour range. Species blooms are shown in the hybrid classes.

Tree Peonies - These are the woody-stemmed peonies and are further divided into Moutan (Suffruticosa), Lutea Hybrids, and European Hybrids.

Intersectional Hybrids - These are the crosses between herbaceous and woody peonies. Most of them fall into the Itoh Group, named in honour of the man who was first successful with this cross.

- **Flower Form**

There are five basic flower forms. Sometimes some of them are combined into one class when the number of entries dictates such action. For instance, doubles are sometimes shown with semi-doubles in one class and anemones are usually shown with the Japanese form though some anemones are shown as doubles. It sometimes depends on the interpretation of what constitutes an anemone since this form covers a wide range of staminode/petaloid development.

Single - This is your basic simple peony with 5 or 10 petals surrounding a distinct center composed of stamens and carpels. Singles have pollen bearing anthers.

Japanese - This form very much resembles the singles. Closer examination of the anthers reveals that there is no free pollen. The stamens have begun the transformation towards doubling, and pollen, though often present, is encased in tissue and usually unavailable. The filaments, which support the

anthers, have also become somewhat flattened. The transformed stamens are termed staminodes and often are coloured with a yellow edge or tip.

Anemone - These blooms represent the next progression in doubling. The staminodes have transformed even further and have lost any resemblance to the filaments and anthers from which they were derived. They look more petal-like, albeit narrower, and are now referred to as petaloids. They tend to be of one colour, which can be the same as the guard petals or a contrasting colour.

Semi-Double - These have a profusion of petals but always have pollen bearing stamens and carpels.

Double - All evidence of stamens and carpels is normally lacking since these have been fully transformed into petals. Careful searching may turn up a few of these structures in much reduced form but typically, when present, they are not seen unless carefully looked for. There are a number of different forms of the doubles and the American Peony Society distinguishes the bomb type, in which the guard petals are longer than the transformed petals, as distinct from the others. The CPS does not at present make this distinction for show purposes.

- **Colour**

Colour is also a criterion used to create classes. In lactifloras we have the basic white, pink, and red. Hybrids have a wider colour range and in addition to white, pink, and red, also have yellow and coral colour classes. Sometimes very pale pinks are shown as blush, or they may be included with the whites. Tree peonies increase the colour range to include purple or lavender and very dark “black” reds.

- **Number of Blooms**

Classes are also set for collections of blooms. Sometimes a class will consist of a specified number of different varieties each in its own container. There are classes for three blooms of one variety, all in one container. Most classes however call for a single bloom. An exhibitor can show the same variety in three or more classes if they happen to have enough blooms of that variety to do so.

HOW TO PREPARE AND CUT PEONIES FOR SHOW

Peony bloom covers about a six week period, or longer, in any one location, particularly if you have taken care to select an appropriate variety of species, hybrids, tree peonies and lactifloras. For this reason many blooms that you see on show day were cut up to three or four weeks earlier and stored in refrigeration. It requires a bit of experimentation to get the timing just right. Serious show people have this down to an art but it is not necessary for the average person. Show winners can be cut from the garden a day or two before the show just as they begin to open and then stored in the refrigerator until required. Storage of up to three weeks or longer can be done as dry stems or with stems in water at temperatures at or just above freezing.

Cut stems a little longer than 12 inches from the bottom of the flower to the cut end. This will be trimmed to about 12 inches when you’re preparing the flower for display at the show. Also remove all the leaves except the top-most ones. Leaves will not add anything to the presentation of your bloom and they are not judged in a positive manner. If leaves are present judges can use flaws in them to place an otherwise winning bloom into the also-ran category. If the leaves are perfect they will not add to your score. **Peony shows are about the flowers.**

The work of producing that winning flower begins soon after the buds begin to form. Except for the occasional “Multiple Blooms on One Stem” class, which the CPS does not include, peonies are exhibited as a single bloom per stem. To achieve this some varieties will need to be disbudded. Leave the terminal bud but begin to rub off the side buds before they get to be the size of a pea. Little flower stem stumps left in the axils of the leaves from too late disbudding will not impress the judges.

Named varieties also need to be labelled with variety name. Small wooden or plastic tags about 1/2 inch wide and up to 3 inches long are most often used for this purpose. They are attached to the stem, just below the flower, with a bit of fine wire.

Entry tags will also have to be completed for each exhibit. This is discussed elsewhere in this document.

WHAT THE JUDGES LOOK FOR

Uniformity is very important. The bloom itself should be symmetrical, not lopsided. In the three of one variety classes all three blooms should be equal in size and condition. It's much better to have three good blooms than two good ones with an excellent one. The excellent one is wasted in this case and is better displayed on its own in a single bloom class. In the three of a variety classes all stems should be the same length. Uniformity can include placement of the variety label on the stem and this little detail can make the difference, everything else being equal.

Uniformity is also important in the collection classes. All blooms should be the same height though when tree peonies are included these may be shorter. In the collection classes the attempt should be made to display a variety in type, form, and colour. All other things being equal, the entry that comes closest to showing the richness available in peonies will take the ribbon. The collection classes are also the ones in which overall presentation can make a favourable impression.

Singles, Japanese, and anemone forms look best when freshly opened while they still retain a cupped form. Doubles generally need to be fully open when judged.

Blemishes in the petals will detract as will evidence of improper disbudding. Leaves are ignored unless they have flaws in which case they will count against you. Always remove all but the top leaves.

WHAT EXHIBITORS SHOULD STRIVE FOR

Exhibitors should try to have fun. It is more important to participate and share your love of peonies than it is to win a ribbon. You will need to participate in at least two shows before you feel you know what you're doing. A third show will let you know you still have lots to learn. While you are undergoing this learning process you will be spreading the joy of peonies and educating the public in the variety and beauty of this flower.

WHAT AN EXHIBITOR CAN EXPECT AT THE SHOW

Show day begins with preparing your blooms for exhibit. Early arrival is important unless you are very well prepared and have made all your decisions beforehand. You will have to put the blooms in the containers provided, fill out entry tags, and place the blooms on the show table.

Show organizers may not have the resources in staff or reference materials to offer very much assistance to all exhibitors on the day of the show.

- **Containers** - Containers are provided by the show committee and must be used unless otherwise noted. Typically, arrangements are not included in the show schedule as competitive entries, but should they be, then containers for these will be the responsibility of the exhibitor.
- **Entry Tags** - Entry tags will be provided and must be completed as directed. This is fairly simple to do, but can be time consuming. It is a good idea to obtain Entry Tags ahead of time so they can be filled out prior to arrival at the show. At the very least entrants should come prepared with all the information required and decisions made as to what divisions and classes their blooms will be shown in. Many exhibitors use "return address" labels instead of filling out this section by hand, particularly if many entries are to be made. Rubber stamps are also a good option for name and address information.
- **Placing Blooms** - Blooms are placed on the show tables by the exhibitor. Table cards placed by the show organizers show where the various classes are to be placed on the tables. Normally the blooms are not moved after they are placed except by the clerks assisting the judges. It is inappropriate for exhibitors to move other people's blooms in any way.
- **Judging** - Exhibitors should remove themselves from the show room after placing their entries unless they have volunteered to help others. This reduces congestion and allows room for other exhibitors to place their blooms. The show room is cleared of exhibitors and the general public during judging. Doors are opened for admission when all judging is complete.
- **Ribbons and Certificates** - Ribbons are awarded to winning entries. Certificates are awarded to Court of Honour winners only. The Court of Honour class is comprised of the best flowers in the show, some of which are placed by exhibitors, and others which are selected by the judges from the show at large. Ribbons and certificates are to be left with the winning blooms until the end of the show. If you are unable to pick them up at the end of the show then they will be mailed to you by the show committee.