

TREE PEONY

LAST month we saw one of the most well-known flower shows in the UK, perhaps the most famous in the world. Chelsea. The flower show has been held at Chelsea since 1913, and it is one of the many shows held annually by the RHS (Royal Horticultural Society).

Another well-known show is Malvern, I attended the show in 2002 and acquired one of the nicest plants I think I've ever bought, and still proudly have. It hasn't let me down yet!

It was one of the greatest 'finds' I've ever got my hands on. One common thing among keen gardeners is having that 'special' or 'rare' plant. 'A kid with a new toy' is probably quite an apt similarity.

The plant I refer to is a **Tree Peony** called *Joseph Rock* (Paeonia rockii, also Paeonia suffruticosa subsp. Rockii) it is a woody species of peony that was named after Joseph Rock (1884-1962) who was an Austrian-American explorer, geographer, linguist and botanist.

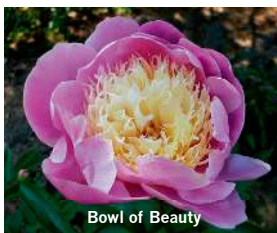
It is one of several species given the vernacular name tree peony, and is native to the mountains of Gansu and adjoining provinces in China.

It was the centre piece of Kelways (The Peony Specialist) display at the 2002 show, I 'hung around' at closing time to grab those bargains and great looking show plants, that after a tiresome week of showing and selling, many horticulturists can't be bothered to repack and hump across the country back home again. A bit of cash in their pockets seems much more appealing for that well deserved beer on the way home.

I bargained and pleaded for the plant with one spectacular flower on, *Joseph Rock*, the almost unbelievable scent and equally spectacular bloom, I wasn't going to leave without it. It had not even been released for sale at that stage. I was so surprised to get it!

Moving on, 13 years later, the plant is now over 6 foot high and 8 foot wide, just to think I had it in the footwell of the passenger seat! This year it has over 40 flower heads on, each one as good as the one I saw at Malvern. Kelways now sell the plant, currently £90 each, however they are limited in number due to being so difficult to cultivate. Only 10 or so available each year!

So, my advice, be quick!



Bowl of Beauty



Shirley Temple

A LITTLE BIT MORE ON TREE PEONIES...

The plant originates from China, possessing significant cultural meaning throughout Chinese history. Currently there are about 600 Chinese tree peony cultivars. Since its introduction abroad, a few unique cultivar groups have been bred in France, Britain, the United States, and some other countries the other type of peonies are herbaceous peonies. Among the most popular varieties are *Shirley Temple*, *Bowl of Beauty* and *Mlokosewitschii* (referred to as Molly the Witch!!!) Molly's true, unpronounceable name - is a plant in which you would willingly make a big investment. It is a queen among perennials and, although not the showiest, certainly one of the most sophisticated.

When planting your peony you need well-cultivated, moisture-retentive soil that's a little on the alkaline side is the best for successful peony cultivation.

Waterlogging spells doom, but a light acid soil will do if it is improved with organic matter to hold the moisture. The plants may be lighter-growing and less muscular, but they will still be happy. Although some shade is desirable for the species, tree roots are not, as they rob the soil of nutrients and moisture, so keep the plants away from hedges and trees.

Plant perennial peonies in Autumn, as the tuberous roots continue to grow after the foliage starts to wither up top, so a newly moved plant will get its feet in before Spring, when energy is needed to provide foliage. Experts tell us never to plant peonies in spring for this reason but, if you are buying containerised plants, spring planting is not a problem, provided you can guarantee moisture at the root in the first growing season. Enjoy the Peony!

RCHS MAILBAG

It's time to catch up on our mailbag, we have replied to each question via email, however here is one to share from Simon in Ruislip...

Q I live in Ruislip and have a North facing garden, can you tell me what rose I could grow up the wall of the house.

A There is not a wide variety of Roses that like full/partial shade, so I have put this question out to the gardening club to see if anyone has any experience in this area. One of our members does have a climbing rose on a North facing wall which is Rosa 'Albéric Barbier' it has a double creamy white flower with a yellow flush. It is a strong rambler so be prepared! The variety is over 100 years old and has the RHS Garden Merit, so should be widely available.

Keep those questions coming in to rchstalks@gmail.com. Log onto our website at ruisiphorticultural.org.uk you can view all past *In and Around* articles there too.

Good luck and see you next month.

Warren