

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 5-26-04) Peonies, ©2005

Peonies and Iris make perfect bouquets this time of year. Boone Brier Farm in Kingston features these exquisite plants. You'll want to venture out to 11067 NE Arness Road in Kingston to meet Jim and Ann Mossman and to drink in the scents and sights of their fields of tempting peonies. While you're there don't miss the Siberian and species Iris too. Jim says, "Iris combine well with Peonies."

To get a sneak peak of the gorgeous blooms at Boone Brier Farm visit their website at www.BooneBrierFarm.com. The site is very user friendly. You'll find many links for information on peonies, iris and how to locate societies for further study and for camaraderie with other gardeners collecting and growing peonies and iris.

Jim commuted to Seattle for twenty-three years designing and building schools. In his spare time he loved to garden. When the thought of retirement became more and more appealing he wondered how to couple his love of gardening into another venture. He always held the memory of his grandmother's peony-lined driveway in Ohio. Jim visited with Allen Rogers who wrote "Peonies" for Timber Press. Allen had Caprice Nursery in Sherwood, Oregon at the time and was starting a Peony Society. Jim bought a dozen Peonies from Allen. "I didn't realize Peonies were slow to establish. But the third year wow!" he said. There's a saying, "First year sleep, second year creep and third year leap," says Jim, "that's peonies."

At the same time, Ann was getting ready to retire from owning and operating Holly Haus in Poulsbo. She had always loved customer service and people and the idea of expanding their gardening passion into a Nursery with plants to share with other gardeners was the perfect next step.

When Mossman's began the nursery they planted Peonies in raised beds and had sheep in a pasture area. The sheep started passing away from old age. Jim says, "As the sheep departed, the peony beds expanded. Siberian Iris, a good combination with Peonies, were a logical addition." Lately Mossman's have started collecting, propagating and selling species Iris too.

Ann photographs and catalogues all the plants in the nursery. She keeps records, writes the descriptions, documents each plant, and tracks and records any diseases or conditions. "I've always loved research," she says. Ann loves the blooms. "I get excited about the blooms they blow me away. I get depressed about failures but who doesn't?" she says. Both Mossmans enjoy meeting people and conversing with them. "People have a lot of questions and we always try to find answers," Ann says.

"We want our customers to succeed with their Peonies. We provide a very generous root because we want them to be successful," said Ann. "We want to get the word out that Peonies are a wonderful flower to grow and we want them to have a good experience."

Mossmans send their customers home with care sheets on how to grow, plant and succeed with Peonies and Iris. In addition nursery visitors will find colorful and informative photo albums with information on each plant grown at the nursery in the past and available at present. Their website also has a bibliography of books for more information on growing Iris and Peonies.

Peony roots vary from “sweet potato to carrot shapes,” says Jim. He recommends purchasing roots with no less than three to five eyes per segment. “The saying ‘Peonies don’t like to be moved’ comes from the fact the plants take two to three years to build roots and then the plant blooms later,” Jim explains. He recommends after dividing the roots and washing gently; leaving the segments exposed to air in a shady spot for several hours (or overnight). This helps the roots become more pliable and easier to plant.

“Peonies are also deer proof,” says Jim. “They’ll taste them but spit them out and walk away,” he said. The only major problem with Peonies is botrytis. Jim recommends good air circulation and choosing varieties that are resistant to botrytis. If you have to treat for botrytis (brownish tips on leaves and/or buds that turn to black) use a copper based fungicide said Jim. He also notes that it rarely kills the roots. Use good sanitation – clean pruning tools immediately with alcohol or bleach and water solution before moving on to prune the next plant. That way you won’t spread disease he says. Ann says, “Don’t burn the debris from diseased Peonies, dispose of it in the garbage, so it won’t spread by air.”

The nursery is open Thursday through Sunday mid-May through the end of June each year. You can call 360-297-7431 or email boonebrier@earthlink.net.

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