

Wisconsin Peony Society

www.wipeonysociety.org



Photo by Tracey Nelson

President's Message

Michelle Ovans, President –

wipeonysociety.president@gmail.com

This year's Annual Root Auction was a great success. Every year, we are blessed with generous donations from growers and individuals. Thank you all for your contributions and for the individuals who devoted their time and energy to organize and hold this auction.

Now that we have prepared the peonies for their winter rest, we have an opportunity to start to look ahead with expectations for next year's blooming season.

The 2025 bloom season will be exciting as we welcome the American Peony Society members from across the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and other countries to Beaver Dam for the National Flower Show and Convention.

I'd like to personally invite all of you to join in the celebrations and enter your prized blooms into the Flower Show & Floral Design Competitions. We are expecting record numbers of visitors to this show. With this show being held later in the bloom season, June 11-15, many of the visitors will be seeing, for the first time, a wide range of cultivars they have never seen.

Convention details are shaping up and will be announced when finalized.



Rose Heart - Photo courtesy of Jerri O'Connor



Callisto - Photos courtesy of Jerri O'Connor

Help Wanted

The annual convention provides opportunities to see peony gardens in full bloom, show flowers in the APS Flower Show, attend peony-related seminars, and visit with other members.

The show can only be a success with your help. We are looking for volunteers to assist the Judges as Recorders, Assistants for Seminar Speakers, and help Staging the flower show. Prior experience is not necessary and this is a great way to learn how judging takes place.

We are specifically looking for volunteers at Beaver Dam High School for the following:

Assistants for Speakers are needed on Saturday and Sunday, June 13 - 14.

Staging for the Flower Show Friday, June 13th from noon until 6:30.

Recorders helping the Judges Friday, June 13 from 6:30 until completion.

There are also other positions to be filled such as people counters, greeters, clean-up people, etc.

If you can help with this upcoming convention, please contact Michelle Ovans: ovanspeonyfarm@yahoo.com

Election of Officers Spring Meeting - March 15, 2025

We are looking for members to offer their services for a 2-year term as a board member. The open positions are: President and Vice-president

In appreciation for your service, you will receive \$25 per year in Peony Bucks, and \$100 toward the Beaver Dam Peony Convention fee for WPS/APS members. This is your opportunity to give back to the organization.

Don't worry, you will not be alone. The other board members are always here to help you learn the position and to support you in every way. Everything is well organized and documented so there is no fear.

Please contact Rita Thomas at rita5586@gmail.com or any board member if you have questions or if you're ready now to throw your hat in the ring. The generosity of your time and talent is greatly needed and appreciated.

2025 Calendar of Events

PBS Wisconsin's Garden & Landscape Expo.

Feb. 7 - 9, 2025

American Peony Society Annual Exhibition & National Peony Flower Show "Artistry in Bloom"

Wednesday, June 11 through Sunday, June 15th.

The National Peony Flower Show and Seminars are Free and Open to the Public

Saturday & Sunday, June 14 & 15

Beaver Dam High School

500 Gould St. Beaver Dam, WI.

Annual Peony Root Auction

Saturday, Oct. 4, 2025

10:00 A.M. - end

Details to be announced at a later date.

Spring Meeting

March 15, 2025 10:00 A.M.

Annual Meeting

Election of officers

Lunch

Signup for the annual picnic - see below

Speaker Scott Parker on Itoh Peonies

Nate Bremer on the APS 2025

Convention

West Madison Ag. Research Station

8502 Mineral Point Rd, Verona, WI

53593

WPS ANNUAL PICNIC

Friday, June 13, 2025, 8:30 to 11:45 A.M.

Ovans Peony Farm

W9904 Cty. Road CP, Beaver Dam, WI.

As part of your current WPS membership, the meal will be paid for by WPS. To attend this special event, you must register no later than May 10th. This can be done by sending Sharon Schmitz an email at: peony_lover@hotmail.com or U.S. mail to: 3775 W Brigham Rd. Barneveld, WI. 53507 or during our Spring meeting.





Nate Bremer, on behalf of the American Peony Society, awards Sharon Schmitz a special Medal of Honor.

Sharon Schmitz Honored by the American Peony Society

Sharon has dedicated herself to the advancement of peonies through her active involvement in the American Peony Society (APS), the Minnesota Peony Society (MPS), and the Wisconsin Peony Society (WPS), for over a quarter century. Stepping in as the membership secretary for APS during long-time secretary Greta Kessenich's illness, she also served as secretary, membership chairman, volunteer coordinator, and auction recorder (before David's program) for both the WPS and MPS, as well as show chairman and a one-time interim treasurer for the MPS.

Sharon is currently the face of The Bulletin for APS advertisers, managing communications, contracts, and placement; always done with a smile.

Her generosity extends beyond administrative duties. Sharon has generously contributed peonies from her extensive collection to auctions held by local and regional societies as well as to public gardens, such as the Henry Vilas Zoo. Moreover, she has selflessly provided divisions of peonies to numerous individuals, enabling them to experience the joy of cultivating these beautiful flowers.

Sharon's commitment goes beyond material donations. She has freely shared her time and expertise, assisting with meetings, conventions, and other peony-related events. Her advocacy for peonies is evident in her daily life, with peony decals adorning her car, spreading awareness wherever she travels.

WPS is also very grateful to you Sharon, for all you do and continue to do for this organization. Thank you!



Peony Growth Stages by Michelle Ovans

The life cycle of the peony is the same each year. This cycle consists of three phases: plant growth, flower growth, and rest phase. As we head into the winter months the peonies are in their rest phase, for herbaceous peonies, the part of plant above the soil line dies signaling that it has gone dormant.

In the winter months I find that I have extra time to read and learn more about the peony care and culture. My ultimate goal is to provide the best care for my peonies throughout the growing season to ensure the greatest number of blooms for the following season.

One of the main elements that has a direct impact on the number of blooms is the maturity of the plant. Peony plants are considered mature between three and four years old, patience is one of the hardest things I find in the evolution of

the quest for multiple blooms, but understanding the stages of growth is vital in my quest to get the most blooms from our cherished plants.

When purchasing roots to plant in the fall, one of the elements that we look for is the number of “eyes” that are attached to a piece of crown tissue. It’s recommended that we purchase or divide our peony roots so that they have at least three eyes. Why is this important? These eyes are dormant buds that contain the plant structure, which grow into stems, leaves, and flowers for the next season. Not all of these buds will become new growth. These buds are present on the roots throughout the year in smaller forms and are most developed in the fall.

You may be wondering what are the best conditions for peony growth. In my experience, the number one condition is very good soil drainage. The soil preparation when planting a new root cannot be overemphasized. Having the soil analyzed and applying the elements that may be deficient. Best bloom production is achieved when the soil pH is approximately 6.

The second condition is adequate water. Early spring, the buds begin to swell as the temperature increases, and they start absorbing warm spring rain. It’s critical that the plants receive at least 1 inch of rain a week during this timeframe for good bud development.

I will continue to the third condition which is also water and, in my opinion, one of the most crucial conditions. Once the peonies have bloomed it's easy to basically consider them done for the season and redirect our focus on other blooming flowers. Peonies tolerate dryness, but during the growing season, the plants are busy in the photosynthesis phase and storing food in big storage roots. Storage of food is where the new growth of roots and eyes comes from. Without this phase, we will not see an increase in next year's blooms. Peonies tolerate dryness but don't expect them to be producing and storing food while the soil is dry. With prolonged moisture stress, we can expect to bring on early die-off of the foliage, which will end the photosynthesis of food storage and limit the plant's ability to obtain its best performance for the following season.

The fourth condition is the removal of the seed pods. The removal of the pods allows all the energy to go into energy storage for root growth and development of eyes and not the act of reproduction.

In conclusion, I would suggest that for maximum blooms that you focus on the development of the roots. It's basically, a root crop you are cultivating to achieve the most blooms.



Seedlings - Photo courtesy of Jerri O'Connor



Guest Garden Program

By Tracey Nelson

It's hard to believe this program has been underway for 6 years. There have been peonies grown out by our members for three years, divided, and placed into the WPS Fall Root Auction. There have been crop failures and Roundup accidents, but overall the program has been successful.

For 2025, there will be a couple of cultivars for adoption available. I don't know at this time of writing, what they will be. If you have an interest in adopting a Guest Garden Peony for the 2025-2028 season, please email me at tcnelson19@gmail.com by February 28, 2025. You must be a WPS member through the "dig year", which will be 2028 for this group. Priority will be those members who have not participated in the past, and next, those who do not currently have a Guest Garden Peony. If the former have been exhausted, then names will be drawn from those interested, if there are more potential participants than peonies available. I will reach out to each interested participant on March 1, 2025.

Thanks to all of the participants of the past and present who have made this program fun and successful.



Old Faithful - Photo courtesy of Jerri O'Connor



Getting To Know Your WPS Board Member: Jerri O'Connor

Interview by Tracey Nelson

Q: How did you first get interested in peonies?

A: I first got interested in peonies because my dad loved them. He bought several to plant in his yard.

Q: Do you remember when you began growing peonies? What was the first peony you grew?

A: I started growing peonies after my parents passed away. I was making a memory garden for them so I would go out to different nurseries to find ones I didn't have.

Q: If you had to choose 5 peonies to grow in your garden, the ones you couldn't give up, which ones would they be and why would you choose them?

A: 1. 'Callisto' I love the color of it and all those petals.
2. 'Lemon Chiffon' Just a ray of Sunshine.
3. 'Roseheart' I love how it fades.
4. 'Blushing Princess' Just a beauty!
5 'Old Faithful' Love the rich color and how it stands out in the garden.

Q: Have you ever participated in an APS Show? If so, what was your favorite aspect of the show?

A: I have gone to several APS Conventions. My favorite part is going on a tour of the peony gardens. I love seeing how they look in the garden. I also look forward to seeing all the different varieties of peonies at the flower show. It helps me to decide on what I need next, even if I don't have the room 😊

Q: Of the APS shows you've attended, which was your favorite and why?

A: My favorite convention would have to be Minnesota because of the tours. I loved seeing so many varieties of peonies and beautiful gardens.

Q: If you had the opportunity to meet any peony hybridizer of the past, who would it be and why?

A: I would have loved to have met Bill Seidl. He has my favorite forms of peonies.

Q: Are there any peonies on your "most wanted" list?

A: Yes, 'Drolla', 'White Vanguard', 'Kim', 'Triphena Parkin', 'Mandaleen', and 'Nelda's Joy'.

Q: How did you come to joining WPS?

A: I joined WPS because of Scott Parker. He was at the Garden Expo with his mom, working in the booth. I went to his demo on dividing peonies. I didn't know there were so many varieties out there. I picked up Adelman's catalog and bought a bunch. I haven't stopped since.

Q: You volunteer for WPS as both a current board member and a person who organizes the booth at Garden Expo in Madison. What do you enjoy about your level of involvement in WPS in your current roles?

A: Love being on the board. You find out things first and help make some decisions on things. What I enjoy the most is the people. Peony people are so friendly and have a great love for their peonies.

Q: If you were to give a WPS member advice about becoming more involved in the organization and its benefits, what would that advice be?

A: The benefit of being a member is you can learn anything about taking great care of your peonies. It's great to hear from other members about what they have planted. You end up adding plants you might not have considered when you hear how much they like them. Ha! I have gotten quite a few this way. The best thing is getting new Peony Pals!

Q: Lastly, I have gotten to see some pictures of your hybridizing efforts, which I have found impressive. When did you begin hybridizing? What inspired you to start hybridizing peonies and how do you feel about the progress you have made thus far? I'd love it if you could share a picture or two of your creations.

A: Ha! I really don't know exactly, but it has been several years now. I wanted to give it a try, so I started in the winter. I started a notebook writing down all of the peonies that had seeds. I then placed orders for roots, with my favorite selections. I had written about it on a Facebook page. One hybridizer asked, why I would have chosen the peonies that I chose. The person said, we really need more hybrids. I started to study up on my favorites. My goal is to get stronger stems, I was less concerned about flower form as the ones I chose had good form. I made notes over the winter, of which crosses I would want to try. I began to hybridize that summer. A few years later, I had my first flowers, which was very exciting. I would give them a couple of years of blooming before fully evaluating the peony. I began to cull the peonies that were not up to my standards, not worthy of keeping. I love watching the seedlings develop and bloom. I have a couple of beds full now and am really looking forward to seeing what develops with my breeding in the coming years.

Jerri currently serves as Director-At-Large on the WPS board.



Seedling - Photo courtesy of Jerri O'Connor

2024 Annual Root Auction by Rita Thomas

We had 111 roots available to auction and proceeds from the sale totaled \$5,140 less \$370 in peony bucks used. The Peony Bucks were earned by members for volunteering at various events throughout the year.

One peony you don't see for sale often, called Blue Rose, was part of the auction. It is described on the APS Peony Registry as "a most unusual shade of deep rose which carries more blue than any peony we know of. The bloom is very large, fully double and as sweetly fragrant as a rose".

Our top sellers were Sunny Boy, which was donated by Sharon Schmitz and sold for \$195, and Seidl's Super, which has Sunny Boy as a parent. This one was donated by Tracey Nelson, and it also sold for \$195. Both are outstanding yellow peonies.

Thank you to all who donated peonies for the auction. It couldn't happen without you. Adelman Peony Gardens, Betty Dahlke, Britta Johnson, David & Linette Sorrentino, Hidden Springs Peony Farm, Jack & Lois Girton, Jeff Delaney & Cory Tischman, Jeremy Duncan, Jerri O'Connor, Laura Cutsforth, Lloyd & Judy Ravet, Oh My Peonies, Parker's Peony & Perennial Farm, Rita Thomas, Robert Tyler, Sevald Nursery, Sharon Schmitz, Solaris Farms, Todd & Julie Hausser, Tracey Nelson, and to all who grew peonies for the WPS Guest Gardner Program.



Seedling - Photo courtesy of Jerri O'Connor



'Lemon Chiffon'

Photo courtesy of Jerri O'Connor



Membership Report

Sharon Schmitz, Membership
Coordinator

We currently have 114 members.

Thirty memberships will be expiring at the end of 2024. Four new members signed up at the October Root Auction.

Next year is going to be an exciting year for the WPS since we'll be hosting the 2025 American Peony Society Annual Convention. I'll be sending out renewal notices in December, so be sure to renew so you don't miss anything! Also, maybe you have a friend who would like to get involved in all of our peony activities? Here's a link for easy renewal or initial membership:

<https://wipeonysociety.org/membership/>

Treasurer's Report

Laura Cutsforth,
Treasurer

10/25/2024

Checking 2,883.86

Savings 15,423.96

Cash 100.00

TOTAL \$18,407.82

Board Members

President: Michelle Ovans

Vice President: Vacant position

Treasurer: Laura Cutsforth

Recording Secretary: Damon Smith

Membership: Sharon Schmitz

Newsletter Editor: Rita Thomas

Director-At-Large: Jerri O'Connor

Director-At-Large: Scott Parker



Blushing Princess - Photo courtesy of Jerri O'Connor