

Virtual Hortlandia 2020

Brothers Herbs & Peonies

www.treony.com

This week Joanne Fuller talked with Rick Rogers at Brothers Peonies and edited the conversation for this article.

Rick, what are your favorite tree peonies?

I love the American hybrid tree peonies. I think they are much better plants than the Chinese and the interspecies crosses (sometimes called Ito Peonies). The discovery of *Paeonia ludlowii* in Tibet in the 1880's brought yellow into tree peony breeding. Hybridizing at Cornell University of *P. ludlowii* with other tree peonies led to a bonanza of translucent mixes of reds and yellows -- tropical sunset colors.

My dad, Allan Rogers, bred p. 'Kishu Caprice' a semi-double strong pink with nice foliage and vigour. My mom loved yellow. So, I bred p. 'Garden Sunshine'. It is a very muscular plant with goblet shaped semi-double yellow blooms that have no red flare. The only red is a little pink on the carpels. It has what people want in a tree peony--clear color, handsome foliage and flaky cinnamon wood- like grapevines.

I also like p. 'Chinese Dragon' which has such beautiful foliage and p. 'Vesuvian' which has full double ruffled petals that are black-red. Reds are tough in tree peonies since they tend towards blue reds that read purple. *Paeonia ludlowii* itself is a great plant. Not only does it have lovely yellow flowers, it has a very finely cut leaf and it is vigorous in the garden.

For me, a plant has to have more going on than beautiful flowers. It has to have beautiful foliage and interesting stems for winter. And it needs to be a strong enough grower to be viable in most garden settings.

How did you get started in the nursery business?

Growing up, my family raised a famous dairy goat herd at our mini-farm in Sherwood. This small family business taught me about sales and showmanship as well as hard work. My dad also had a good garden growing all kinds of perennials. When dad retired, he and my mom started Caprice Farm Nursery. Ultimately, my dad wrote the book *Peonies* which is still considered an important work on the genus *Paeonia*.

I came home from college in 1976 and worked in construction for a while. When the construction business disappeared in the early 80's, I started working in the family nursery. Eventually, I started Brothers Nursery and specialized in tree peonies.

I'm a one trick guy. Growing tree peonies is a bit different. They are rarer, more unusual plants. They also don't require a huge amount of acreage, equipment and staff. We have been a bigger operation in the past, but now we are really happy to be a husband and wife team selling what we love.

Are tree peonies hard to grow in Northwest gardens?

Tree peonies can be excellent garden plants here. There is this myth that you need cold winters to get peonies to bloom. Unlike herbaceous peonies, tree peonies only need 400 hours of below 40 degrees air temp (cumulative) in order to establish buds. Intersectional and herbaceous peonies want full sun, but tree peonies can grow in shade. They are forest plants so they need mostly deciduous shade with diffused light.

Tree peonies do not like chemical sprays. Even a breath of Roundup is a real problem. Also, they don't like wet feet, which is the biggest challenge here in the Northwest. I often suggest that gardeners plant them mounded. You can also grow them in large containers (12-15 gallons at least). They group well with containerized Japanese maples.

How can customers buy plants from you right now?

You can take a look at our website www.treony.com and download the order form there. We have always done mail order and local plant deliveries to customers. Right now, we are at the Hollywood Farmers Market. Customers can shop our booth there or pre-order and schedule for us to bring a plant to the market. We are available to consult on the best plants for a particular site. All of our customers get 'Rick's personal delivery absolute happiness guarantee'.