

## Plants of the Heritage Garden: Common Peony—*Paeonia officinalis* 'Rubra Plena'

by Friends of the Garden

Of the four peonies in the Heritage Garden, this one is the most recent acquisition, but with a pedigree that goes back further and in greater detail than any of the others.

Our plant can be traced back to Mrs. (Moore) Penny (1809-1888) of Carbonear. She gave a plant to her son Judge Alfred Penny (1851-1922), who in turn gave it to his niece Emma Penny Louder (1886-1976). Thereafter it went to her daughter, Ida Louder, who gave it to Roy Louder of St. John's in 1994. Finally a plant was given to the Garden in 1999.

This hardy peony has red, double flowers on 60 - 80cm stems. Leaves are dissected into 3 - 5 lobes. In the peony world, it is considered a mid-season bloomer, which in Newfoundland means late June to early July.

Peonies like fertile, moisture retentive yet well-drained soil. They benefit from an annual spread of compost or well-rotted manure as long as it is not placed too close to the crown. These add to the soil fertility and help retain soil moisture. The yearly addition of lime is also beneficial as, in the wild,

peonies hail from limestone regions.

With peonies, it is important to pay close attention to the planting depth; the growth buds on the fleshy roots should be no deeper than 5cm (2") below the soil surface. Deeper planting can prevent flowering. Peonies resent transplanting, so plant them where they can remain for many years. If you do need to move a plant, it is best done in the fall of the year.

