

Graffeg Publish an Impassioned Celebration of the Peony by Chelsea Gold Medal Award Winner Alec White

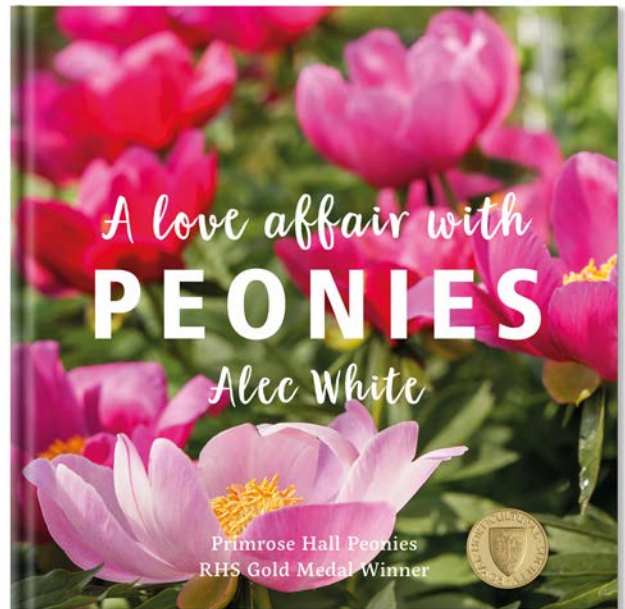
Graffeg are delighted to be publishing *A Love Affair with Peonies*, the first book by RHS Chelsea Gold Medal winning peony grower Alec White.

Driven by a passion for horticulture from a young age, Alec shares his extensive expertise and personal experience in this illustrated celebration of the peony. Written from Alec's perspective as a professional peony grower and enthusiast, the book is accessible to both gardeners and non-gardeners and is more than just another gardening title – it conveys the inspiring story of how Alec pursued his passion to achieve the first RHS Chelsea Flower Show gold medal for peonies in eight years.

Varied chapters introduce each of the qualities that make this remarkable flower stand out: their many varieties, scents and colours, how to care for and cultivate your plants, the historical and cultural significance of the peony and the hard work and commitment needed to exhibit at the UK's leading flower shows. Each is superbly illustrated, with the photography showcasing the range of colours and changing shades of peony blooms to their cultivation on the nursery and art works featuring or inspired by peonies.

A Love Affair with Peonies is a book to be returned to again and again, whether to appreciate the excellent quality of the images and illustrations, for entertaining insight or for expert practical advice. This is Alec's story of a dedicated career combined with all of the essential information needed to appreciate peonies to the full and keep them thriving in your own garden.

Further information for this title as well as cover and author image downloads are available at our media page [here](#). To request review copies, interviews or further images for use with editorial, please contact: daniel@graffeg.com/02922 404970.



A Love Affair with Peonies

Author Alec White

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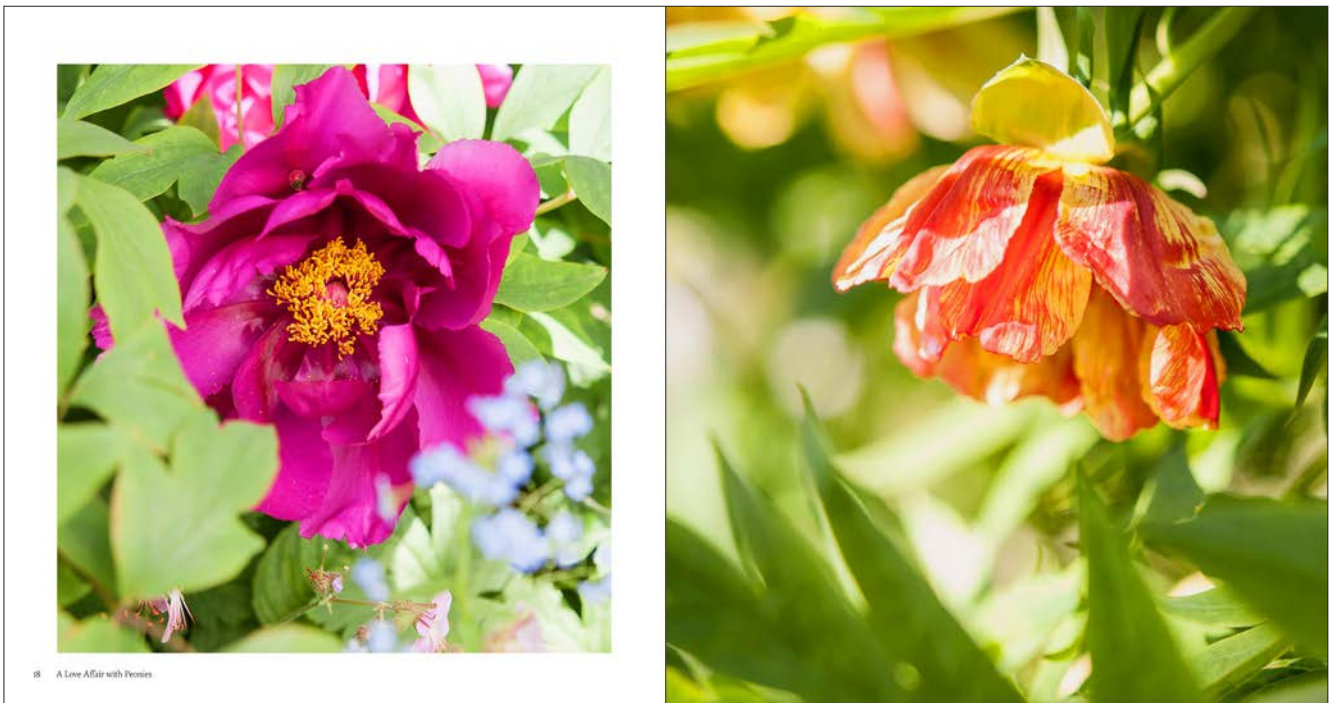
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Alec White is a master peony grower and owner of Primrose Hall Peonies, Westoning, Bedfordshire, a RHS Chelsea Flower Show gold medal award-winning specialist peony nursery. With the largest selection of rare and collectable peonies for sale in the UK, the nursery regularly exhibits at shows such as RHS Cardiff, RHS Malvern, RHS Chelsea Flower Show, RHS Chatsworth, RHS Hampton Court Garden Festival, RHS Tatton and BBC Gardeners' World.

<h2>Contents</h2> <p>At the outset I was pretty clear about how I wanted this book to be: easy to read, interesting and informative, fun and entertaining, full of beautiful photographs, accessible to both gardeners and non-gardeners, encouraging and inspiring. Through these chapters I share my experience and knowledge of growing peonies and my story of pursuing my dream to run a peony nursery and exhibit at the highest level.</p>		 <p>My Love Affair with Peonies 13 My journey from love at first sight of a peony bloom to becoming an award-winning grower.</p>	 <p>Perfect Plants for the Garden 31 Hardy, long-lived and sensational as they flower, peonies are the perfect plant for any garden and gardener.</p>	 <p>Peonies as Cut Flowers 123 Strong-stemmed, tall and with a vase life of seven to ten days, peonies make excellent cut flowers, allowing you to further experience, admire and enjoy them.</p>	 <p>Fabulous Peony Flowers 135 Vibrant and decadent, peony blooms are undoubtedly their most show-stopping characteristic.</p>	 <p>The Perfume of Peonies 151 While most well-known for their visual qualities, peonies also offer a remarkable range of scents.</p>	 <p>Common Myths about Peonies 159 Dispelling common peony myths and frequently asked questions to help your plants succeed.</p>
 <p>Types of Peonies 35 Herbaceous, woody or intersectional peonies offer different qualities and considerations.</p>	 <p>Growing and Caring for Peonies 53 Learn each of the essential steps to growing and caring for your peonies.</p>	 <p>Tough and Versatile 87 Despite their beautiful and delicate blooms, peonies are one of the most robust herbaceous plants in the garden.</p>	 <p>A Riot of Colour 101 Exploring the marvelous range of colours and changing shades peony blooms exhibit.</p>	 <p>The Stars of the Show 169 A behind-the-scenes look at the creativity and dedication required to exhibit and win awards at the UK's most prestigious flower shows.</p>	 <p>Propagation 185 Learn the process of effectively dividing your peony roots or propagating from seed.</p>	 <p>The Peony in Art and Culture 191 Discover the cultural significance the peony has maintained and its inclusion in art and literature around the world through the centuries.</p>	 <p>Places to See Peonies 202 Where to find the finest peonies in the UK's public gardens.</p>

Varied chapters discuss Alec's passion for peonies and the many elements which make this remarkable flower stand out.



The changing colours of peonies

Facing page: The colour fade on *Paeonia 'Coral Charm'* AGM seen transitioning from bright coral, peach, to lemon yellow and then cream. Page 107: *Paeonia 'Old Faithful'* is an excellent example of a peony flower changing colour from ruby red to an antique rose pink fade.



1. Opens bright pink.



2. Colour softens to pale pink.



3. Colour changes to salmon.



4. Colour fades to coral.



5. Bloom lightens to pale peach.



6. Finally fades to pale yellow and cream.

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A Riot of Colour 105

The book's photography superbly captures the variety of colour and appearance peonies exhibit.

Coral and Orange



Paeonia 'Apricot Queen'



Paeonia 'Coral Charm' AGM



Paeonia 'Coral Sunset' AGM



Paeonia 'Singing in the Rain'



Paeonia 'Sonoma Welcome'



Paeonia 'Orange Victory'



Paeonia 'Court Jester'



Paeonia 'Coral Scout'



Paeonia 'Sonoma Honey'

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Pink



Paeonia 'Fantasia'



Paeonia lactiflora 'Reine Hortense'



Paeonia 'Madame Calot'



Paeonia lactiflora 'Noemie Demay' AGM



Paeonia lactiflora 'Catharina Fontijn'



Paeonia suffruticosa 'Shimano Fuji'



Paeonia lactiflora 'Pink Parfait'




Paeonia lactiflora 'Eden's Perfume'



Paeonia lactiflora 'De Telf'

A Riot of Colour 103



The plant's own food reserves will sustain it and with very little care it will live for many decades.

The importance of good roots

The most important consideration when purchasing a peony is the maturity of the plant, and more precisely the maturity of the roots, because peonies often don't tend to flower reliably until they are five or more years old. At five years and over, the peony roots will have three to five or more buds (or 'eyes') and will be much more resilient and likely to flower the following season. As seedlings, peonies are vulnerable to pests and diseases and inherently more delicate and susceptible to the worst ravages of nature. Once the plant matures and the tuberous roots develop, though, peonies quickly become robust, especially with fat, healthy, roots that store food to keep the plant going through the winter and other tough times. If the plant does not get sufficient food and nutrients in the growing season, it will eventually deplete its own food reserves and die. Usually, though, the plant's own food reserves will sustain it and with very little care it will live for many decades. The importance of strong, healthy roots cannot be understated.

The importance of good root systems applies equally to herbaceous and woody peonies, but perhaps even more so to woody peonies because many of the plants that are available in the garden centre will have been grafted onto herbaceous root stock in order to produce a commercially viable plant more quickly. There are advantages and disadvantages to 'own root' and grafted woody peonies, but ultimately both will provide healthy plants if cared for properly.

Woody peonies with their 'own roots' often take longer to establish, being especially vulnerable during their first few years in the garden, but will eventually produce a better, stronger plant.

Far left: Two-year-old tree peony grafted onto rootstock.
 Left top: Herbaceous peony bare root showing the crown and bright pink, jewel-like buds (or 'eyes').
 Left bottom: Herbaceous bare-root peony showing fine white hairy feeder roots.

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Alec shares his extensive experience for an accessible guide on growing and caring for peonies.

Time spent preparing the soil in advance is well worth it and well-aerated (that is to say that has an open structure and that is not compacted), fertile and free-draining soil will provide the best possible opportunity for peonies to thrive. Observation is key, though, and it is worth keeping a watchful eye on soil conditions over the decades – from time to time, you may need to top dress with additional organic matter and add additional fertiliser if the soil is poor and not especially well aerated.

Water

Water is, of course, hugely important for the successful growth and development of all plants. With peonies, watering is particularly important in the spring, when the flower buds are developing, and also in late summer/early autumn, when the plant is producing its below-ground growth buds for the following season.


Although well-established peonies will tolerate drought and dry conditions in the summer, they will not generally be creating food and adding to the food storage in their roots, which means that their performance the following season may be impaired and the foliage may die off earlier than would normally be expected. It is best to ensure that peonies do not completely dry out over the summer and are watered regularly. Please do not be tempted to overwater peonies – your peony will not thank you.

Sunlight

Peonies generally perform best in full sunlight. Inadequate sunlight will result in fewer blooms of lesser quality and weaker flower stems and, ultimately, if the level of shade is too great, the loss of flowering completely, followed by the terminal decline of the plant. There are, however, some herbaceous peonies that perform well in shadier positions, and light shade can result in peonies with flowers that have stronger colour and greater fragrance. In order to produce healthy plants with strong stems and plentiful blooms, herbaceous and intersectional peonies require between six and twelve hours of sunlight and woody peonies a little less, perhaps four to six hours each day.

Please do not be tempted to overwater peonies – your peony will not thank you.

Right: New peony shoots seen in early spring as they start to emerge from the ground after winter.



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