

Plant lovers' corner

SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL PEONIES

Peonies are among the most dependable flowers in the spring perennial garden, flowering year after year with only a little care.

If your peonies are not flowering well this year, Donald B. Lacey, Extension specialist in home horticulture at Cook College, Rutgers University, offers some possible causes:

They may be planted too deep. The "eyes," or buds on the crown, should be no deeper than two inches beneath the soil surface.

They may have been recently transplanted. It often takes peonies two or three years following transplanting to recover to flower.

If buds develop to the size of a quarter or larger, then fail to open, the problem may be bud and flower blight. Control for this disease comes earlier in the season and is described in a Rutgers peony bulletin you can get from your county agricultural agent.

Peonies planted near trees or shrubs which shade the plants and compete for moisture and nutrients may not flower well. Select a sunny, well-drained location for planting peonies.

Plants may be undernourished or too dry. Apply 5-10-10 fertilizer in early spring at one pound to 30 square feet of garden area. Water peonies well in dry periods, especially while buds are developing.

CROWN GALL WEAKENS ROSES

Most roses that have been planted within the last two seasons should be growing well and flowering abundantly if they have been given any reasonable care.

If your rose bushes aren't doing well they may have bacterial crown gall, suggests Spencer H. Davis, Jr., Extension specialist in plant pathology at Cook College, Rutgers University.

The bacteria that causes this disease can live in the soil and your plant may have become infected through this source. You may have even purchased the plant with the tiny galls on it.

The crown gall disease results in brown, irregular, hard, woodylike growth on the main stem and large roots that has the appearance of an English walnut. When the galls grow large they cut off the water and food supply and the plant becomes weak and often dies.

Once a rose bush has the gall disease there is nothing you can do but pull it up and discard it, says Dr. Davis. No fungicide or other chemical can cure the plant.

Crown gall disease is present on many other crops, too. It can attack willow trees, rhododendrons, tomatoes and zinnias.

PICK OLD GERANIUM FLOWERS

Most good gardeners know that old flowers must be picked if they want the plant to continue blooming. The primary reason is that plants produce seeds and then stop flowering if old blossoms remain on the plant.

Disease prevention is another good reason for picking flowers from geranium plants, advises Spencer H. Davis, Jr., extension specialist in plant pathology at Cook College, Rutgers University.

Over-mature or dead flower parts become a haven for some fungi or molds, he explains. These same molds, landing on a healthy green leaf would cause no damage at all.

But once the mold gets started in the dead flower parts it can progress to a point where it invades the plant, says Dr. Davis.

If you have noticed black, target-like spots on otherwise healthy leaves, you are probably looking at a secondary type of infection.

A tiny piece of dead petal or even one of the anthers of the flower may start the focal point of leaf spot infection.

Commercial geranium growers don't have time to remove dead flowers from geraniums, and so they spray their plants every week. It's much simpler for the home gardener to pick the faded flowers.

ROSE DISEASES

It's unfortunate, but true! The number one plant in the popularity contest for use in the home garden is the rose.

And the plant with more disease problems than about any other garden plant is the rose, says Spencer H. Davis, Jr., Extension specialist in plant pathology at Cook College, Rutgers University.

Two common and troublesome diseases are black spot and powdery mildew, says Dr. Davis. Black spot causes, as the name implies, spots on the leaves that eventually result in loss of leaves.

By late Summer all bottom leaves will be dead and gone. Your rose may look like a little green umbrella.

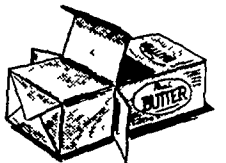
Powdery mildew doesn't result in much defoliation, but it coats the leaves and flower buds with a powdery fungus growth. Leaves curl, buds fail to open and plants suffer.

Several chemicals prevent one disease or the other. And many garden mixtures have one of each type of chemical in the package. But only two - phaltan and benomyl - give good control of both black spot and powdery mildew.

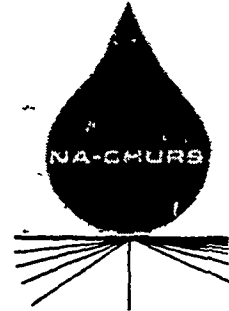
Apply sprays or dusts regularly, Dr. Davis suggests. Once a week is a good schedule starting now. And the plants will keep their leaves and produce flowers all summer.

Moving Tips

Always inform insurance companies when changing a place of residence so premium notices won't get lost. Extension specialists at The Pennsylvania State University point out that failure to pay premiums on time results in expiration of some policies and the end of coverage.



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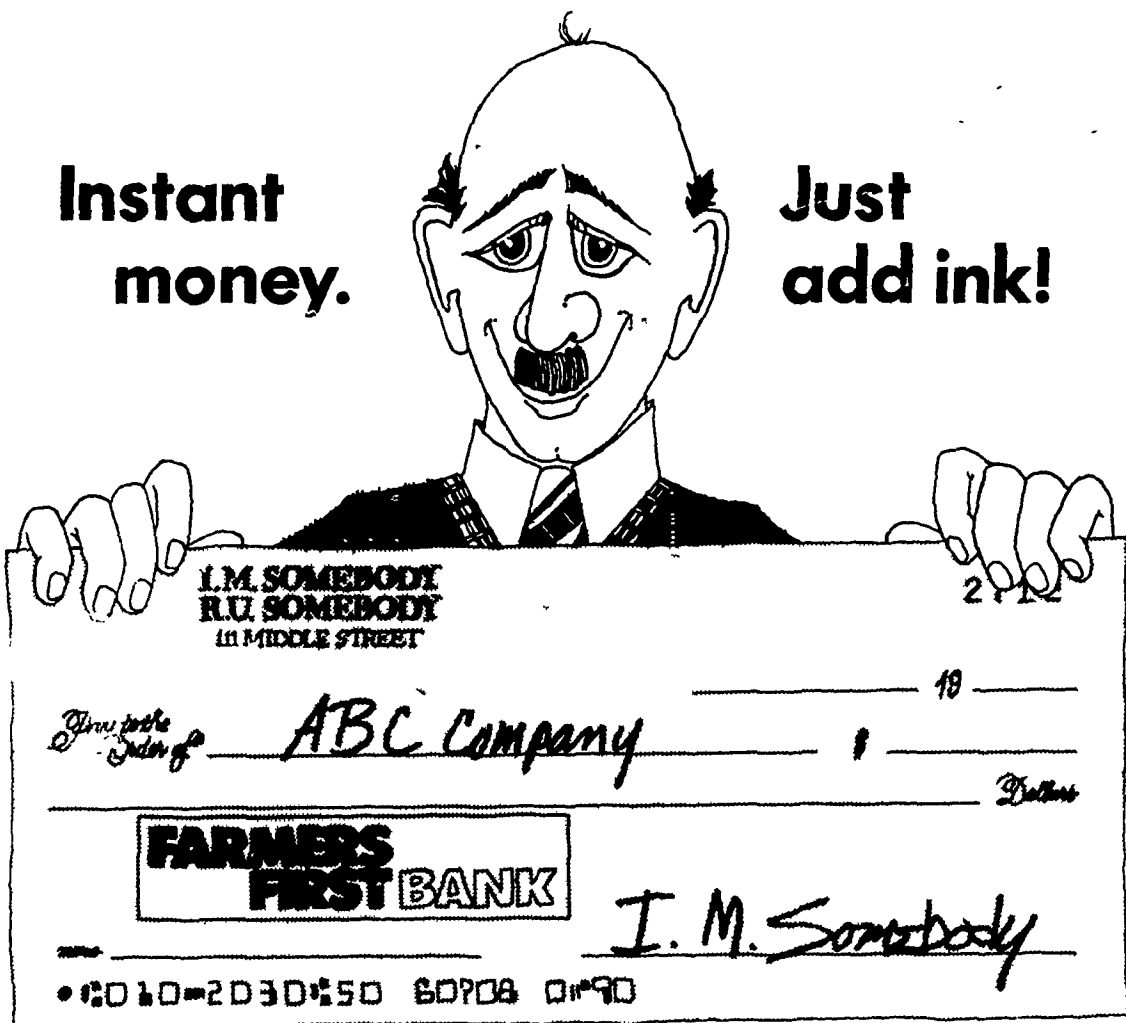
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