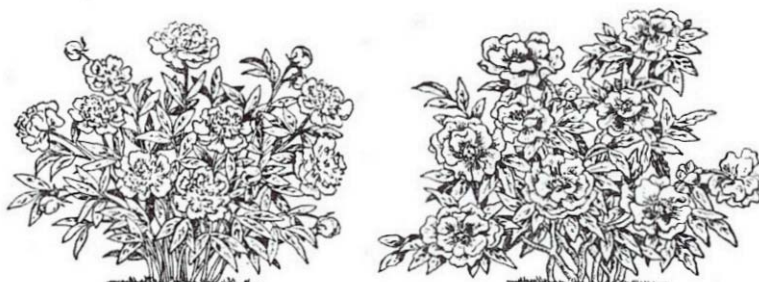


An Intersectional Point of View
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Herbaceous x Tree Peony

*Comments on the Use of Basal Flares as an Identifying
Characteristic in Intersectional Hybrid Peonies*

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Flowers with central flares are very common in the intersectional hybrid group. Overall, nearly 2/3 of my hybrids have flowers with basal flares. These flares vary from small and/or lightly colored ones, which are sometimes barely noticeable (21%) to large and/or darkly colored ones that are often extremely prominent (42%). In either case, I have long assumed that these flares were a consistent floral feature that could be used as one of a number of permanent characteristics for describing and identifying a specific cultivar. It was pretty simple I thought, either a cultivar had flowers with basal flares or not. Now, after several years of more careful observation, I am quite certain that it is not always this simple.

Years ago, I remember observing occasional flare-less flowers on the Itō hybrid YELLOW EMPEROR. At the time, I didn't think too much about this phenomenon. I considered it a rare oddity just like the unusual half yellow and half purple flowers that occasionally appear on a number of my intersectional hybrids. Over the years there have been many other examples of flared and flare-less flowers appearing on the same plant, but nothing that was especially notable or systematic. Earlier this year, I registered a new cultivar, STARBURST SYMPHONY, where I made special note in the registration description of the considerable variability with regard to the basal flares exhibited by this variety.

This spring there were several more examples of other cultivars in my garden where this phenomenon was also observed. Fortunately, I was able to document some of these cases with photographs of side-by-side flowers where one flower is flare-less while the other displays prominent basal flares. In some cases, this difference is exhibited by two flowers on the same stem. In the final analysis, however, the occurrence of a few flare-less flowers among the large majority of flared flowers is little more than an interesting oddity that is hardly worthy of serious notice. On the other hand, the occurrence of flowers with flares on cultivars with otherwise pure (flare-less) yellow flowers represents an issue of greater interest.

Pure yellow cultivars, which have no red in the center, are much less common among the intersectional hybrid group. The absence of these flares, especially if accompanied by the absence of red or pink stigma and filaments, gives the flowers a pure yellow appearance that is very attractive and also quite popular among those looking for something a little different in the intersectional group. One example of such a pure yellow cultivar is my 2002 introduction, YELLOW DOODLE DANDY. The lack of any red color allows the pale green color of the carpels to dominate the flower center and thus gives the entire flower a slightly greenish yellow appearance that can be enchantingly beautiful. Consequently, I am always very pleased to discover additional pure yellows among my first-time bloomer each year.

One of this year's bigger disappointments was the discovery that one such "pure yellow" was not reliably so. A very promising unnamed seedling, GL #-R5P6, which had previously displayed only pure yellow double flowers, suddenly produced multiple flowers with small, light-red flares. When I checked this out more carefully I was surprised to discover that the flared flowers were all from sidebuds whereas the previous flare-less ones had all been terminal flowers. Although, I had previously noted other important differences between terminal and sidebud flowers among the intersectional hybrids (e.g. sidebud flowers are usually smaller, but frequently more double than the terminal flowers, see APS Bulletin No. 334), this is the first time a systematic difference in basal flares has been noted. I will keep close watch on this cultivar in the future to determine if this odd characteristic is consistent from year to year. In the meantime, I will generally try to be more careful when observing basal flares and in each case attempt to indicate where there is noticeable variability in this important flower characteristic. I would be very interested to hear from others who have comments or observations on this topic. I am especially interested to know if anyone has observed this phenomenon in the lutea hybrids or other tree peony cultivars.