

Peony Crown Depth and Chill-Hour Troubleshooting Checklist by USDA Zone

Companion Reference Sheet for: Peony Planting Depth: The Small Error That Costs Blooms
Save this PDF to your phone or print a copy for field reference. Verify local conditions and manufacturer specs before use.

Key Takeaways

- For bare root herbaceous and Itoh peonies, use the eyes as your depth reference. For a potted plant, use the crown and preserve the level it had in its container.
- Judge depth from the finished soil surface, including the soil that settles after watering.
- Grafted tree peonies are different: position the graft union below the soil surface rather than using the shallow eye placement for herbaceous peonies.
- Check sunlight, drainage, plant maturity, and winter cold before assuming depth is the only cause of poor flowering.
- Find more practical garden guidance at [The Garden Den](#).

Set the eyes at the right level

Peony type	Planting material	Depth reference point	Target depth
Herbaceous peony	Bare root	Eyes, measured from the finished soil surface	1 to 2 inches below the surface for spring planting
Itoh peony	Bare root	Eyes, measured from the finished soil surface	Position the eyes shallowly below the surface
Herbaceous or Itoh peony	Potted	Crown, compared with its level in the pot	Keep at the same level as it grew in the container

Choose a suitable site and prepare the soil

Peony type	Depth reference	Position relative to finished soil	What to watch
Herbaceous and Itoh	Eyes on bare root plants, crown on potted plants	Eyes shallow below the surface; potted crown level matches its container position	Extra soil or mulch can bury the eyes or crown
Grafted tree peony	Graft union	4 to 6 inches below the surface	Measure to the union, not to the bottom of the hole

Use this field checklist before backfilling

- ☐ **Identify the peony type.** Decide whether it is herbaceous, Itoh, or a grafted tree peony, because the correct depth reference changes with the type.
- ☐ **Prepare the site first.** Choose a sunny position with well-drained soil, then loosen the planting area so roots can spread into it.
- ☐ **Measure from the intended finished soil surface.** Position the eyes or graft correctly, and spread bare roots without bending or bunching them.
- ☐ **Backfill and water gently.** Settle the soil around the roots, then confirm that the eyes or crown remain clear of soil and mulch.