

Paeonia brownii

Common Name: Western Peony, Brown's Peony

Brown's peony is our only native peony. It is related to the Ranunculaceae or buttercup family. It is native from southern British Columbia to California, from the East Cascades into Idaho, Utah and western Wyoming. It is a steely or bluish gray leaved plant similar in structure to the ornamental peony (a native of Asia) but is a smaller plant (18-22") and has smaller flowers. The leaves are fleshy, divided with deep lobes and are on multiple stems. The globose flower is about 1 ½ inches across with 5-10 reddish-brown petals, surrounded by 5 or 6 greenish or reddish-green sepals. The golden stamens are in a circle around the visible ovary. It is a very striking flower. It is a plant of yellow-pine forests, chaparral, and sagebrush prairies. Although it is a perennial, in a very dry summer it may go dormant.



We recently had occasion to see it in full bloom the first weekend of April near Troy, Oregon along the Grande Ronde River. I have only seen it in three locations - all just over the border in Oregon however Dr. Doug Henderson mentioned once on a field trip that the UI Herbarium had seeds which were labeled from Moscow Mountain so it would be worth looking in open ponderosa pine areas for it.

It was collected and described by Douglas in Oregon in 1826; he named it for an English botanist, Robert Brown. It was also described by William Jackson Hooker in 1829.

Variations: A northern California variety is sometimes referred to as a separate species *Paeonia californica*, but others refer to it as a *Paeonia brownii* as well.

Use in the landscape: It should do well in the garden if its conditions are met. It would need wet soil in the spring, followed by a late summer drying out period. It would benefit from winter snow cover. It is often found under pines or other shrubs so would tolerate some shade. Although it could probably be started from cuttings or segments of root (which ornamental peonies do – albeit reluctantly sometimes) it would probably be easier to start from seed harvested as soon as it was ripe.

Edibility: Not edible. Native Americans evidently used various parts of the plant for medicinal use. One remedy mentioned was a 'tea from the roots for lung ailments'.

Pests: Deer, rabbits and mice usually leave ornamental peonies alone, and the plants I've seen in the wild had no damage that could be attributable to animals.

Native Plants should not be dug from the wild. Please purchase from reputable dealers.

For more information do a Google search on *paeonia brownii*. Or see Arthur R. Kruckeberg, [Gardening with Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest](#); or Dr. Dee Strickler's [Wayside Wildflowers of the Pacific Northwest](#).