

Paeonia officinalis L.

Common Peony

Family: Paeoniaceae

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According to Pliny, the term **Paeonia** derives from the Greek doctor Paeon (son of the god of medicine Aesculapius) who healed the god Mars when he was wounded in battle against Diomedes, and Pluto wounded by Hercules. Others believe the name could derive from a region of Greece north of Macedonia, where the plant grows wild.

The Peony is a perennial, herbaceous plant with **large, bright red flowers** from May to June,



(Photo MRSN)

with large petals surrounding an intense yellow stamen.

Peonies have evolved very little and still show primordial features that many other plants have lost during adaptation to their environments.

Its medicinal qualities have been known since ancient times. The roots and petals were used against epilepsy, while as far back as Roman times it was believed that a

garland of the leaves could cure madness.

Modern **phyto-therapy uses** only the alkaloid and essential oil extracted from the petals and roots to treat anxiety, spasms, convulsive coughing and varicose veins (to be used with attention, due to its toxicity).

In the past, the seeds (similar to dark, hard peas, containing a toxic substance) were also used to make necklaces for children, to help reduce teething problems.

Its highly **ornamental value** means it is widely cultivated and various types exist.

In the Aosta Valley, it is a rare species found only in two areas, in Perloz and the lower Champorcher valley.

Bio-Montagne - Réseau d'éducation sur la biodiversité dans les zones alpines - Programma di cooperazione transfrontaliera Italia-Svizzera 2007-2013