Peony Garden at Ann Arbor

By Aubrey Tealdi, Director

The Peony Garden of the University of Michigan in the Nichols Arboretum was opened to the public in June, 1927, five years after work had been begun on the project. It was the outcome of an idea sponsored by Dr. W. E. Upjohn, who offered to secure peony roots by enlisting the co-operation of leading peony growers. It occupies an area of about three acres in the west section of the Arboretum.

Choosing the Site

The site was chosen with reference to a suitable pictorial setting for the garden. The finest plants and flowers can not show to the best advantage unless they are given a suitable setting. The land was graded extensively and with great care to develop ground shape that would harmonize with the surroundings and insure convenience and ease in maintenance. While the site was graded to afford proper drainage it was tiled also to take care of surplus surface water and to prevent all washing even in the case of violent rainstorms.

The soil which was heavy clay was limed and subsequently enriched liberally with cow manure. To add more humus peat moss also was incorporated.

The Garden

The garden is divided in two sections: the first consists of a systematic collection arranged according to season in three divisions—early, mid-season, and late, each division being arranged according to color beginning with the whites through the cream whites, flesh, pinks to reds; the second is a garden designed to show the use of the peony as a garden plant together with other garden flowers. This second section has been graded and the soil worked for the past four seasons but except
In the Peony Garden at Nichols Arboretum, University of Michigan.
for some of the boundary planting has not yet been developed. The statements that follow will refer therefore to the first section as shown in the accompanying illustrations.

GARDEN PROTECTION

The site is enclosed by a non-climable wire fence which on one side has been used to support a collection of climbing roses. Plantings of pines and other evergreens on sloping ground are included within the enclosure as well as a still vacant space which is intended for the future collection of tree peonies. It is planned to build here the shelter and garden house to overlook the garden.

WATERING

Water is piped to the garden but dependence is placed upon early and late cultivation and a generous mulch of peat moss during the blooming season for the conservation of moisture.

The planting plan of the collection has been made as simple as possible. It consists of ten rows of square beds occupying a long rectangular area with grass paths eight feet wide. Each bed provides for two specimens each of fifteen varieties spaced sufficiently far apart to insure perfect development of each specimen. The arrangement permits visitors to study each variety at close range without tramping down the soil around the plants.

CHARTING AND LABELING

One of the usual troubles in connection with horticultural collections is due to willful or careless handling and misplacing of labels. Apart from the confusion to the visitor and the waste of time involved in replacing and checking them, labels, if conspicuous, are most disfiguring to a garden picture and if inconspicuous encourage people to tramp around the plant. To avoid these difficulties, labels have been dispensed with. To make identification positive and easy each bed has at each corner, flush with the ground, a concrete marker showing its number as it is shown on the identification chart. A copy of this chart is given to visitors at the entrance to the garden and is found very useful for recording notes.

ONLY MERITORIOUS VARIETIES PLANTED

The number of peonies is limited to those varieties of established merit, i.e., those that have some decided claim to be perpetuated for the present at any rate. The collection is intended to be kept up to date.

While the University collection may be considered already a fairly representative one, it lacks a number of distinctive new introductions which would increase its interest and value. Contributions of such varieties would be much appreciated and the donors would be assured of the best care and growing conditions for them.

GARDEN ATTRACTING VISITORS

It is gratifying to be able to report that the garden has attracted already considerable attention. Last year the number of visitors was ten times greater than the year before when it was first opened. In addition to giving pleasure to thousands the garden is justly considered as having a valuable educational function which is not limited to the locality in which it is situated.

AN INVITATION

The interest and moral support of the Peony Society is enthusiastically welcomed. It is hoped that at some future date when the Society meets in this vicinity, a trip of inspection to the Nichols Arboretum will be included in the programme of the meeting.

Richardson's peonies, "Norfolk" and "H. A. Hagen" at the Arnold Arboretum.