

PAEONIES FOR THE FALKLANDS?

by

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Paeonies?

Paeonies are a wide group of hardy, attractive flowering plants, particularly valuable for the cut-flower market in North America and Europe.



Can they grow in the Falklands?

In a word, yes – several gardeners around the islands already grow Paeonies outdoors. Over recent years, contacts between the UK Falkland Islands Trust and the University of Magallanes in Punta Arenas has raised the idea of growing Paeonies commercially in the Falklands. Paeonies can be grown commercially in Punta Arenas for export to a lucrative out-of-season market in the USA. Following some basic research into the potential to grow Paeonies and the marketing opportunities available, the Trust and the University of Magallanes feel that:

- (a) Paeonies could be grown in the Falkland Islands, probably on a commercial scale
- (b) There is an opportunity to link with a producer in Punta Arenas to export (by air) from the Islands to northern hemisphere markets.
- (c) The time is right to put up a business case to support at least an investigating pilot project.

Is there a market out there?

Paeonies are being commercially grown by at least one producer in Punta Arenas (Flores de la Patagonia Ltda.). Flores de la Patagonia Ltda. and University of Magallanes have been growing Paeonies for several years. The latter on a scientific scale and the former for about 4 years producing 50,000 stems last year. All of these were boxed, cold stored, flown directly to Santiago and then onward to Florida for a December/January market which has to depend on no supply or expensively grown northern hemisphere plants. An experienced Chilean agent (Chilifresh Ltda.) handles the whole transport/marketing operation and has good cold storage facilities at Santiago. Flores de la Patagonia Ltda. is very happy with the returns they get from this operation. The work is relatively concentrated on the months of December and January with few but important inputs for the rest of the year. Flores de la Patagonia Ltda. does not try for the Christmas or Valentine market but these could be even more profitable and demand is currently outstripping all they can supply. It is also felt that the UK as well as the rest of the EU out-of-season market is not yet exploited as all the Chilean production can be absorbed in the US.

What do we know about growing them?

The Paeonies in Punta Arenas are being grown in an exposed, coastal site with strong and very well done windbreaks. The soil is quite light and needs to be well cultivated. Production is intensive – Flores de la Patagonia produces 50,000 stems from an area of 5,000 square metres. The soil has to be limed up to a pH of 6.5 and a fertilizer regime has been worked out. Normally plants are at 80 cm between rows and 40 – 50 cm between plants.

The UK Falkland Islands Trust through Flores de la Patagonia Ltda brought some rhizomes of Paeonies (the varieties are grown from large rhizome sections) across to the Falklands in 2004 and planted some out around Stanley, Fitzroy and Shallow Harbour. In the first year, survival was good and some plants even flowered, when normally it would take at least 2 years in the ground for this to happen.

In 2005 many of the rhizomes produced flowering stems before Christmas (earlier than the same varieties in Punta Arenas). We now have good experience from Punta Arenas on the best varieties for the region, for those that the market wants in the US (mostly red and white ones like *Red Charm*), but although a variety like *Sarah Bernhardt* doesn't grow well in Punta Arenas it might perform better in the Falklands. There are price implications for varieties. Once cut, stems can be cold-stored for over a week with no deterioration so a weekly flight should present no problems.

Cultivation and growing profile

| YEAR | MONTH | PLANT | FERTILISER |
|------|----------|---|--|
| 1 | March | Plant out rhizome | Lime at planting Light foliar Oct → |
| | December | Leaves | |
| 2 | Jan | Only | Foliar feed ¹ (Jan-Feb) |
| | March | Cut Leaves (April – Aug Dormant) | Fertilise ² (March (100 P ₂ O ₅)) Lime (March) |
| | Sept | | Fertilise (50 kg N) |
| | Dec | 1 – 3 stems (Remove) | |
| 3 | Jan | | Foliar Feed (Jan – Feb) Fertilise ² (Mar) 50 kgN Fertilise ³ (March) P ₂ O ₅ |
| | March | Cut off leaves | Lime (March) |
| | Sept | | 50 kg N |
| | Dec | 5-6 stems Remove 2 or 3 best for sale and cut head only off the rest | |
| 4 | Jan | | Foliar Feed (Jan – Feb) Fertilise ² (Mar) 50 kg N |
| | March | Cut off stems & Leaves | Fertilise ³ (March) P ₂ O ₅ |
| | Sept | | Lime (?) March 50 kg N |
| 5 | Dec/ | 8 – 10 stems | |
| | Jan | For sale | Foliar feed (Jan – Feb) Fertilise ² (March) 50 kg N |
| | March | Cut leaves Split rhizome & replant on part | Fertilise ³ (March) P ₂ O ₅ |

Fertiliser regime:-

Jan Jan (after flower removal)
Standard foliar feed each week till first week in March

Fertiliser 2. Half Nitrogen dose (50 kg N ha⁻¹) as
eg. Nitrochalk (avoid urea/ammonia)

March Fertiliser 3. { Second half of Nitrogen (50 kg N ha^{-1} as
Nitrochalk (for rhizome growth over winter)
100 kg $\text{P}_2\text{O}_5 \text{ ha}^{-1}$
100 kg $\text{K}_2\text{O ha}^{-1}$

Liming Regime Optimum pH is 6.5. Bring up to this gradually with autumn/winter application of Calcium Carbonate (approx $200 \text{ g/m}^2 - 2 \text{ tonnes/ha}$) for about 3 years to bring up.

Sulphur Depending on soil analysis approx 40 kgs/ha in Autumn.

Getting started?

If you are interested in growing Paeonies commercially in the Falklands and wish to put together a business case to FIDC to do so, the Trust will give you the information it has found and put you in contact with Flores de la Patagonia Ltda and/or University of Magallanes to discuss many of the finer details of growing and marketing the flowers.

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