

Store cut peonies before they open by wrapping the stems and buds loosely in paper and laying them in a refrigerator. When you are ready to use them, trim the stems and put them in clean water at room temperature.

Choose buds that are ready to open

Peonies store best when the buds have developed some color and feel soft when gently squeezed. Florists often compare this stage to the feel of a marshmallow. Buds that are still small and hard may not open well after they are cut, even with time in water.

If you are cutting peonies from a garden, use clean, sharp shears and leave enough stem for the vase you plan to use. Handle the buds gently. Bruised petals may show damage as the flowers open.

Remove any leaves that would sit below the waterline later. You can also remove most of the remaining leaves before storage, since foliage takes up space and loses moisture. Keep the buds and stems dry before wrapping them.

Keep the flowers cool

Wrap a small bunch loosely in paper, with the stems and buds supported but not crushed. Newspaper or plain wrapping paper works. Lay the bundle flat on a refrigerator shelf where nothing will press on it.

A refrigerator temperature of about 1 to 4 degrees Celsius is suitable. Do not put the flowers in the freezer. Freezing can damage their tissues and leave petals limp or discolored.

- Keep peonies away from apples, bananas and other ripening produce. These can release ethylene gas, which can shorten flower life.

- Use a clean shelf and keep the wrapped flowers away from food spills.
- Check the bundle for damp paper or damaged stems. Replace the paper if it becomes wet.
- Make room for the buds so they are not flattened by containers or other items.

For best results, plan to store the flowers for a few days rather than relying on long storage. Their condition when cut, the refrigerator temperature and the variety all affect how well they last. Some buds may open sooner than others after they come out.

Bring the buds out of storage

Unwrap the peonies and look over the stems. With clean shears, cut a little off the bottom of each stem. Put them straight into a clean vase of fresh water, making sure no leaves sit below the surface.

Leave the vase at room temperature and give the buds time to take up water. Opening speed varies, so check them regularly if you need the flowers for a particular day. Change the water and recut the stems if the water becomes cloudy.

Keep the vase away from direct sun, heaters and ripening fruit. Once the blooms open, a cool spot will help them last longer.

Cold storage slows peonies down, but it cannot improve a bud that was cut too early or already damaged. Start with healthy, soft buds and bring them out with enough time to open.

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