



The Gansu Mudan Peony - by David Ledsham



The **Gansu Mudan Peony** has a very long history. Many many years ago it emerged from its Chinese hinterland already containing the combined genes of a number of wild Chinese Peony species that had been specifically grown in monasteries, temples and gardens for their medicinal properties, the active ingredient being principally derived from the bark of the roots. It wasn't until much later that successive cycles of hybridisation gave rise to the highly ornate Peony which we know today. Over time more than 1000 cultivars have been produced in China with each cultivar bearing a specific, complex and typically poetic name. In Europe these names were not easily assimilated into the established practices of botany and horticulture which were current in the West, and anyone who would like to take a closer look at this inevitable culture clash between East and West might check out Will McLewin's book where he and Dezhong Chen attempt to unravel the authentic identities of the wild Chinese tree Peony species. You will find that Western plant collectors were not above obtaining their discoveries from monasteries and nurseries under the assumption that these plants were truly wild species and not the result of many years of domestic cultivation. From that point onwards the waters became well and truly muddied. *Paeonia rockii* (POM June 2019) is just one of these cultivars.

Meanwhile the Gansu Mudan Peony continues to perform for us every season, hail, rain or shine, oblivious of all the confusion. And fortunately this very long lived shrub requires the minimum of fuss, simply a bit of careful pruning here and there. Furthermore, for all its delicate beauty, it proves to be as hard as nails and capable of withstanding the extremes of the coldest of winters ... East or West