

*Paeonia delavayi*

[Synonyms : *Paeonia delavayi* var. *alba*, *Paeonia delavayi* var. *angustiloba*, *Paeonia delavayi* var. *atropurpurea*, *Paeonia delavayi* var. *lutea*, *Paeonia delavayi* fo. *superba*, *Paeonia franchetti*, *Paeonia handel-mazzetti*, *Paeonia lutea*, *Paeonia potaninii*, *Paeonia potaninii* fo. *alba*, *Paeonia potaninii* var. *trollioides*, *Paeonia trollioides*]

**TREE PEONY** is a deciduous shrub. Native to south-western China it has dark red flowers with many golden stamens.

It is also known as *Dian mu dan* (Chinese), Maroon tree peony, Moutan peony, *Pivoňka delavayova* (Czech), *Strauchpäonien* (German), Tree peony, Yellow peony, Yellow peony, and Yellow tree peony.

*Delavayi* commemorates a French missionary, explorer and plant collector, Jean Marie Delavay (1838-1895), who authorities believe was the first European botanist in western China. He arrived in China in 1867 and had served, on behalf of the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris, in Guangdong in southern China and Yunnan in south-western China before his death. Over the centuries many Christian missionaries in China suffered persecution and death at the hands of Chinese rebels (despite various treaties signed with China by the missionaries' homelands) and in 1869, in Guangdong, Delavay was prosecuted as had been two of his peers in 1867 and 1868. Until 1881, when he returned to France briefly, Delavay had had little botanical experience apart from, according to some records, collecting a few plants in Canton province for H.F. Hance, a British consul in Huangpu (then known as Whampoa) when he first arrived in China, but during his short visit home he met the Lazarist missionary and naturalist, Père Armand David (1826-1900) who introduced him to the French botanist, Adrien René Franchet (1834-1900). The latter persuaded Delavay to collect plants for the Natural History Museum of Paris on his return to China and from 1882 although previously little tried in this field Delavay proved to be, according to all authorities, one of the most meticulous, diligent and successful of plant collectors. He travelled alone, primarily in the mountains in north-western Yunnan province, and would collect and make notes on about 200,000 specimens (embracing 4000 odd species including roughly 1500 new plants). His intention was to find plants suitable for cultivation in Europe but authorities believe he was largely thwarted in this as he only sent home a few specimens of any one species. The 'stream' of specimens was interrupted in 1888 when he contracted bubonic plague from which he would never fully recover and, as a result of which, he would be partially paralysed. He travelled to Hong Kong for recuperation and resumed plant hunting during his journey there. But his health was still fragile and he eventually had to return to France – only to yield in 1893 to his desire to get back to China. In the following two years he gathered about 1550 additional plants before, in 1895, finally succumbing to his ill health from which he died that year in Yunnan province.

The shrub was introduced to North America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

This was one of the plants discovered in 1884 by Père Delavay.