

Antique Roses[®]

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WHY OLD ROSES?¹

Overshadowed by modern hybrids, old roses have been overlooked in this century; but now there is a renaissance afoot to restore the older cultivars to their rightful place in the garden. Their historic interest, color, fragrance, and form make old roses as indispensable to today's gardens as those of centuries past. And, as many gardeners will attest, the best thing about old roses is that they provide all the landscape values without becoming a maintenance burden.

Long before its extensive hybridization, the rose had survived cheerfully in the gardens of history. Early rose cultivars retained the resilience and fortitude programmed by nature, but these qualities have been neglected in modern hybrids developed primarily for showy blooms. Unlike modern roses which grow poorly without many hours of devoted attention, most old roses will give today's busy homeowner an appreciated rest from much of the heavy fertilizing, spraying, and nurturing demanded by their younger cousins. Some old rose cultivars actually prefer a minimum of pruning. And as specimens found in old cemeteries and abandoned homesites attest, many have survived without care from human hands.

Modern roses are hybridized primarily for their striking colors and long bud forms. The shape of the plant itself is not appealing, especially if judicious pruning is not practiced. Old roses have an inherent beauty of form — a quality that does not diminish over the years. The old rose colors tend to be more muted and pastel than modern hybrids, but many collectors develop a preference for the softer hues. Many old rose cultivars display handsome foliage, while others set attractive hips in the fall. This makes old roses especially useful as landscape plants. The unforgettable "true rose" fragrances live in their undiluted form in old roses. You will not find such richness and diversity of fragrance in modern hybrids.

These plants grow best if vegetatively propagated, which means that the rose cutting you receive may have originated from the actual plant that could have been admired by Pliny, cultivated by a Chinese emperor, grown at Malmaison by Empress Josephine, or carried West by an American pioneer woman. It is this tie with the events of human history that, we feel, makes the old rose the ultimate antique unlike a painting or a piece of furniture. The old rose is a living testament to history and to man's quest for beauty.

ACQUISITION — ROSE RUSTLING

Rose rustling is the catchy promotional name coined by enthusiastic Texas plant collectors, to describe the "search and rescue" of lost and forgotten roses. Use of the term usually insures some coverage by garden writers and journalists bent on getting the public's attention. The pillaging of unprotected roses by black clad gardeners riding horseback in the middle of the night with shovels in hand is the usual image this term conjures. This image, while alluring and lucid is far from what occurs when rose rustling. Ultimately, the preservation of these roses is the rustlers'

¹ Except from 1984-5 Antique rose catalogue.

worthy goal. Many of these lost and forgotten roses have toughed it out on their own for years in less than perfect surroundings. Some have been forgotten or are no longer available in commerce yet still live where planted years earlier. A found rose could be the only remaining survivor of its kind. A good rustler will do what he can to ensure the rose's survival by trimming dead branches away and removing competing weeds in hopes the original plant can continue living for as many years to come as it has already lived. If healthy, cuttings can be taken (with proper permission) to create other roses identical to it in case the original plant dies. In this way, time-tested roses will be available for future generations to enjoy.

THE BEST ROSE CLASSES FOR THE SOUTH

The lion's share of these surviving roses fit into several rose classes. The best roses suited for the south are indicated below. (The following excerpts of class descriptions are taken directly from The Antique Rose Emporium's Reference Guide.)

1) China Roses. It was perhaps a bit cheeky for plant hunters from Europe to claim they had "discovered" a new rose. In reality, the Chinese mandarin who owned the garden in which it was found knew it was there, and had probably selected it as part of his landscape. The simple truth is the Chinese had been breeding their single wild roses into double garden forms a thousand years before westerners had any idea that was possible.

Probably the most exciting aspect of the China rose for Westerners was not the silkiness of the petals (which open well even in high humidity) or the full bushy plant with its dainty foliage, but their repeat blooming. During their introduction from China, ever-blooming roses were unknown in Europe, where only the 'Autumn Damask' could be expected to rebloom occasionally in the fall. These original China roses are also credited with being one of the founding parents of the Tea roses, Noisettes, and Bourbons, as well as strongly influencing the hybrid Perpetuals, Polyanthas, and hybrid Teas. The Chinas offered here are highly disease resistant, and are likely to live a very long time. It is not unusual to find specimens aged 100 years or better blooming furiously, with no assistance from man. Quite common in the south, they are among the hardiest and best Old Garden Roses for warm climates.

2) Tea Roses. Hybrid tea roses are thought to be the product of crosses of *R. xodorata* (syn. *R. chinensis*) and *R. gigantea*. Their names, 'Hume's Blush Tea-scented China' and 'Parks' Yellow Tea-scented China' are indicative of their China heritage and fragrance. The tea scent, which gives the class its name, is comparable to the fragrance of crushed fresh (not dried) tea leaves, and is exquisite. The close affinity with the China class is also seen in the bushy habit of growth, forming lush bushes with bronzy red new foliage. Teas are well suited to the southern climate and their huge bushes are often found marking old homesites in central Texas, where they have survived with no care whatsoever for decades. In the southern states they are quite disease resistant and bloom profusely in a variety of rich, soft shades throughout the growing season, though spring and fall displays are probably the best. Aside from fragrance, the Teas differ from the Chinas in the size of their flowers, being generally larger and fuller. Since the ancestors of the long-budded hybrid Teas are in this class, it is not surprising that they make good cut flowers as well as being fine landscape plants. These memorable roses have been in southern

families for generations and are often recalled with nostalgia as “the rose my grandmother grew.”

3) Noisettes. The American South is the ideal setting for this graceful class of roses; this is their home, their birthplace. John Champneys of Charleston, South Carolina, raised the first Noisette by crossing the fragrant, cluster-flowered *R. moschata* with the remontant ‘Old Blush’. The result was ‘Champneys’ Pink Cluster’. Champneys shared cuttings and seeds of his new hybrid with Philippe Noisette, a professional Charleston nurseryman, who raised several seedlings and passed them on to his brother Louis in Paris. The best of these was introduced as ‘Rosier de Philippe Noisette’, while the rest were simply referred to as noisette’s, and they captured the attention of all France. It was its ever-blooming characteristics, which so quickly attracted the French growers to this rose. Soon many new cultivars were being produced. The influx of Tea parentage in the 1830s produced even larger flowers, and expanded the range of colors. The noisettes are generous in their production of highly-scented flowers in pale shades of cream, pink or yellow.

Usually grown as climbers, pillars, or fanned out on a fence, these gracious aristocrats were among the most popular roses of the 1800s. They are again much in demand as gardeners endeavor to expand their use of the vertical element and bring fragrance, beauty, and a touch of nostalgia to their landscapes.

4) Polyantha, Floribunda, and Miniature Roses. About 1860, Jean Sisley of Lyon, France, received from his son in Japan, the seeds of the wild *R. multiflora*, a strong climbing rose with huge clusters of fragrant, single white flowers. Guillot, the famous rose breeder of Lyon, grew some of these Japanese multifloras at his nursery and was rewarded in 1872 when a natural cross with nearby pink China roses produced the first members of the polyantha class. The Chinas gave their ever-blooming characteristics and compact shape to this rose class, while *R. multiflora* contributed its plenitude of clustered flowers. French breeders worked with the polyanthas extensively for a number of years after their introduction in response to demands for massed color in flowerbeds and borders.

The carefree polyanthas were crossed with the larger-flowered hybrid tea roses to develop floribundas, a hardy class of prolific bloomers. Properly called “cluster-flowered roses” today, we have chosen to retain the earlier name to distinguish our floribundas from the many classes of old garden roses that also bloom in clusters. They are really quite a distinct group of roses, more open in habit than the bushy polyanthas but healthier and more compact than the hybrid teas.

5) Hybrid Musk Roses. By crossing Trier, a hybrid *R. multiflora*, with teas, hybrid teas, Chinas and hybrid perpetuals, retired cleric Joseph Pemberton came up with a class of large, hardy plants that resembled none of these quite as much as they did their very distant musk ancestor. Even the fragrance tends to be musky, so the name stuck, though they could be more correctly called hybrid *R. multiflora* or hybrid noisettes.

A number are large, arching and cascading bushes that can stand alone in the landscape, weep over a pond, be pruned into a flower-covered hedge, or trained as a climber. Others are chunky shrubs varying in size from large container plants to bushes that would not look lost against a barn wall. The flowers are generally produced in clusters, most heavily in spring and fall, with scattered flowers in summer, once established. They open in beautiful pastel shades with strong,

lingering fragrance that easily fills a room. They also tolerate more shade than do most cultivars of roses and can suffice with 4 h of direct sun daily.

In *The Rose Annual*, Graham Stuart Thomas summed up the hybrid musks: "Unless some keen spirit is prepared to produce some richly coloured shrub rose along the lines adopted by Pemberton, I think this group should remain as it is: carefree flowering shrubs of the greatest value for our gardens at midsummer or later, delightfully fragrant, in a fair range of colours, and of superb value for hedging — Joseph Pemberton served us well."

OWN ROOT ROSES PRODUCTION

The best time to root roses is the fall (1 Oct. to 15 Nov.). Cuttings of 7.6 to 10.2 cm (0.13 to 0.25 inches) length are taken from turgid, but not woody, growth of 3 to 6 mm (0.1 to 0.3 inches in diameter). They are stuck directly into rose pots containing pulverized bark, perlite, peat, and vermiculite (5 : 3 : 1 : 1, by volume) and slow-release fertilizer with micro-nutrients. For the first 2 weeks, cuttings are held in misted greenhouses with 20% shade. Shade is removed and mist is decreased gradually for 3 additional weeks. Roses will remain in cold protected houses until March transplanting. Success rates are 30% to 90% depending on individual cultivars.