

## Selecting Rose Bushes

### SCOPE

This article provides information and tips on how to select roses for your garden. Not all roses are created equal, nor should everyone use the same criterion when choosing roses. Individual selections are driven by a variety of reasons. Many people select roses to serve as focal points in their overall landscape, while others acquire them primarily to compete at rose shows. These contrasting goals are important factors when selecting roses. Other issues such as garden size, available gardening time, and tolerance for using chemical fertilizers, fungicides, and insecticides, as well as color and fragrance preferences can influence selections. Margaret Wolfe Hungerford, author of *Molly Bawn*, wrote in 1878, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." This adage could not be more valid than it is in the choice of roses. Rose variety bloom cycles, growth habits and hardiness are just a few of the considerations that come into play. Sources, propagation methods and health of the specimen are also important considerations. No matter what your selection criterion, chances are good you can find roses to satisfy your needs.

### EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES.



So how should you begin your selection process? While it is always dangerous to over-stereotype, a good place to start in evaluating choices is with rose origins or classes. The American Rose Society has classified roses in three groups: species, old garden roses (OGR) and modern roses. These groups are further subdivided into classes. Roses within each class have many common characteristics such as bush growth habit, bloom size, shape, and to some extent bloom cycles, fragrance, color and where they grow best. General information about rose classifications can be found in the American Rose Society's annual publication: *Handbook for Selecting Roses*.

Species roses sometime referred to as wild roses represent the earliest specimens, whose origins date back as far as 40 million years ago. Like pre-historic animals many are extinct and almost all are more difficult to find than OGR or modern roses. Many species roses are fragrant, only bloom once a year and require a lot of space. The largest variety living today is *R. banksiae* (Lady Banks' Rose) that grows in Tombstone, Arizona. From a single trunk, it spreads over an arbor that covers over 8,000 square feet. Unless you have space and structures to support large specimens, species varieties may not be a good choice.

Old garden rose (OGR) varieties include roses whose class existed prior to 1867. OGR bushes are generally larger than most modern roses and require more space to grow. They are known for their resilience and ability to survive with minimal care. In fact, many have been rediscovered in recent years on old homesteads or cemeteries where they have had little or no care for decades. Most OGR rose varieties are more than 20 years old so patent restrictions do not apply. That means you can propagate them from cuttings until your hearts content, with little or no cost. There are many rose classes within this group, but the most commonly grown in the southeastern areas of the USA are China, Tea, Noisette and Bourbon roses. These are attractive choices because most roses in these classes are fragrant, perform well in our climate and are repeat bloomers. China roses are generally smaller than other OGR varieties ranging in height from 3-5 feet. China colors and blends include red, yellow, pink and white. While white blends are fairly common, Ducher is considered to be the only true white China rose. Typically, China roses have thin branching canes covered by clusters of roses. Many are phototropic, that is they change colors as they are exposed to light. A good example is Archduke Charles that ranges from a pale pink to a deep wine red color as the bloom ages. Bloom forms range from singles like Mutabilis; pom-pom shaped Pink Pet, to cupped, globular blooms like Louis Philippe. Some have a spicy fragrance and nearly all are low maintenance, tolerant of hot weather and pruning. Tea roses are the forerunners of our modern Hybrid Teas. Bushes are usually a little bigger than Chinas, with longer weak canes supporting drooping large cupped and globular blooms. Marie van Houtte, a pink blend, is an example of a low maintenance tea rose that performs well in Florida. Most tea rose blooms have 17-25 petals with a full range of colors and color blends including reds, yellows, whites and pinks. Tea roses do not respond well to severe pruning. Noisette is the only OGR class originating in the United States. Many within this class are large sprawling repeat blooming roses that can easily reach 20 feet tall and therefore are excellent candidates for growing on structures as climbers. The most common colors are yellow, white and pink. Damask and China roses were crossed to produce repeat blooming Bourbon roses. Many Bourbon roses like Souvenir de la Malmaison have quartered cupped blooms and a fruity fragrance.

Modern roses include roses whose classes were not in existence prior to 1867 and are the varieties most widely available in commerce today. Flowers can vary in size from less than an inch to over six inches in diameter. Since all modern roses are the result of cross breeding of old garden and species roses, bloom size, shape, petal shape, petal count, color and fragrance vary considerably, even within each class. Bloom shapes range from high tight centered roses that typify Hybrid tea (HT), Grandiflora (GR), Miniflora (MinFl) and Miniature (Min) varieties to single, quartered, rosette, globular and cupped forms more commonly found in Floribunda (F), Shrub (S), Polyantha (Pol) and other modern varieties. You can choose almost any color rose other than black or blue. Rose color and color patterns typically include shades of white, yellow, apricot, pink, orange, red, mauve and russet. Many hybridization programs have focused on rose form and color to the detriment of fragrance and disease resistance characteristics common in older varieties as an outcome of the natural selection process. As a result, most modern roses require more maintenance than OGR or species roses. That being said, it is difficult to surpass the beauty of modern roses and rose gardens.

#### RESEARCH BEFORE YOU BUY

All too often, roses are purchased solely based on a spur of the moment aesthetic appeal, not on how they will perform or satisfy your gardening goals. Before you select roses for your garden, it's important to do

some basic research. Accumulate as much information as you can on roses that are grown in our area by visiting local rose shows, public and private rose gardens. Whenever possible use reference material written by local experts who know which roses grow well in our southern climate and soil. A good place to start is with local rose society consulting rosarians, newsletters and websites and local agricultural extension services. You can obtain accurate, free information from American Rose Society (ARS) Consulting Rosarians listed at [http://www.ars.org/Crs/cr\\_by\\_area.html](http://www.ars.org/Crs/cr_by_area.html). The ARS Handbook for Selecting Roses and American Rose magazine are good references included as part of a membership in the ARS. There is a wealth of information available on the internet, but be cautious in applying it, because it may contain recommendations based on colder or dryer climatic conditions or soil structures different from those in our area. If you want to compete at rose shows, and have an ultimate goal of winning Queen of Show you will want to weight your purchases with those Hybrid Tea and Grandiflora roses with potential to win. To help narrow your choices, research the records of recent rose shows in the ARS Deep South District on its website at <http://www.deepsouthdistrict.org>. On the other hand, if your primary goal is to produce a garden full of beautiful roses your selection options are much more flexible. In any case, select bushes that fit available spaces in your garden. Roses need to be spaced far enough apart where they have room to grow, good air flow and room for easy maintenance. There is no single pat answer on how far bushes should be planted apart. Because of the widely differing growth patterns and sizes of rose bushes, you should use information on plant tags, other reference publications like Ortho's: All About the Easiest Roses to Grow, by Dr. Tommy Cairns and internet sites like <http://www.helpmefind.com/roses/> to determine potential bush size. It is important to note, rose bushes tend to grow larger in Florida than the average sizes you will find in national publications and on the internet. Time spent learning which roses are low maintenance and easy to grow is paramount for people who have limited time to care for their roses. Texas A & M University oversees the "EarthKind™" program which lists the lowest maintenance roses to grow. A current "EarthKind™" list can be found at: <http://earthkindroses.tamu.edu/>. While most rose require at least 5-6 hours of daily direct sunlight, you can find recommendations on roses that are somewhat shade tolerant on sites like: <http://www.woodlandrosegarden.com/rose/shade1.htm>.

#### AFTER RESEARCH

Before you buy a rose examine it thoroughly. Look for any dead or unhealthy canes or insects like scale or spider mites. Always buy grade 1 healthy roses with at least three strong basal canes. It's a waste of time and effort to try nursing an unhealthy plant or one with poor form. With very few exceptions, all rose classes live longer and perform best in Florida if grafted on fortuniana root stock. Fortuniana root stock is used to counter the threat of nematode damage which can destroy own-root roses and those grafted on other root stocks. You can also avoid nematode damage by growing roses on their own roots in pots containing organic potting mixtures with little or no sand. This method works particularly well for growing miniature roses. Many OGR, because of their hardier nature can survive on their own roots. In any case, don't buy roses on multiflora or other root stocks not specifically suited to our southern climate. Whenever possible, purchase potted roses; bare root roses may have less initial cost, but attrition rates are generally higher. If possible buy roses from local nurseries specializing in roses. They will give you the best advice available and normally will stock products helpful in growing roses and/or direct you to other good sources. As a second choice, order roses by mail from nurseries specializing in roses grafted on fortuniana root stock. Cool Roses (Tel: 1-561-684-2421, <http://www.coolroses.com/>) and K & M Nursery (Tel: 1-601-648-2908, [millsrose@myway.com](mailto:millsrose@myway.com), <http://www.kandmroses.com/Roses%20Pages/Roses.htm>) are two excellent mail order sources specializing in roses grown on fortuniana root stock. If neither of the first two options is available purchase roses from your local general purpose nursery or box store like Wal-Mart?, Lowe's or Home Depot. Using good sources when buying roses and related garden supplies will go a long way toward increasing your chances for success in growing beautiful healthy roses at minimum cost.

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