

BLOOMIN' AND BOOMIN' American Grown Roses Compete with Foreign Imports

“Roses are the most popular fresh cut flower,” states Patrick Busch, CEO of Len Busch Roses, the only major grower of fresh cut roses in the Central United States. While sales of cut roses is booming in this country, the number of growers of fresh flowers has wilted to a mere 280, as cheaper floral imports flood our market from Columbia and Ecuador.

“Innovations in everything we do is critical to surviving in this business,” explains Busch as we tour his half-million square feet of greenhouses. “It’s not how we did something last year that matters.....it’s what we are doing today to make sure we are here for our customers next year,” he adds.



A beautiful bloom of Kristine ready to harvest

Production greenhouses for cut roses operate 365 days a year, which can be a challenge during a sub-zero winter in Minnesota. Innovations such as double-walled acrylic greenhouses

help retain heat and being the city’s largest recycler of wood also helps keep heating costs low.

“We grind 200 yards of wood an hour (the equivalent of 500 semi-truck loads) and stockpile the material until winter when it is used to produce heat in the boilers that keep the greenhouses warm. If we had to pay for heating we would be out of business,” explains Busch as we continue on the tour.



600 tons of shredded wood chips heat the greenhouses each winter

Len Busch Roses produces 2 million stems of fragrant roses a year and almost all of the process is done by hand. I was amazed when Busch demonstrated the secret to creating those long stemmed beauties, in a process known as “bending.”

Undesirable stems of a plant are bent downward at a 90° angle right above

the bottom two leaf nodes at the base of the stem.



Busch demonstrates how plants are manipulated to produce long straight stems

Bending forces the leaf axils below the bend to form new stems and inhibits the growth of the stem that is above the bend. New stems erupt from the bottom leaf axils and those stems are much stronger than the rest because the carbohydrate supply of the bent stem is redirected providing additional energy toward the newly forming ones.

Bending allows for easy harvesting, less foliage damage and reduced plant sizes. In a continuing process, unharvested stems are bent downward to produce more axillary buds for the next cycle of flowers.

In full production, a rose bush in a 3-gallon pot will produce flowers every 45 to 52 days or about 6 crops a year per plant. Unlike traditional growing methods for field-grown roses, bushes producing cut roses using the bent stem method are not pruned because

plant height does not increase. Pruning is not necessary because all new growth forms at the base of the plant resulting in longer straighter stems of flowers.



Greenhouse of Naranga roses ready for harvest

At Len Busch Roses, a rose bush is grown in a 3-gallon pot for about 7 years before being replaced. Innovations in irrigation and fertilization (also known as “fertigation”) through computer controlled systems programmed to inject specific amounts of nutrient-rich water to each plant produces more flowers per square foot than field-grown plants. Integrated pest management is the preferred method of dealing with insect control as pesticides applied to foliage have a

negative impact on photosynthesis (and therefore flower production).

When it comes time to harvest, methods developed more than 20 years ago are still used today. At just the right stage of bud formation, stems are removed from the mother plants by hand and then recut a second time while submerged in water to allow water to move up the stems. Stems are then transferred to tepid (110°) water with a floral preservative added and allowed to sit for several hours for maximum hydration.

Cut flowers are graded by stem length (18 inches to 24 inches) and downgraded for short or broken stems and poor flower or foliage conditions and then bundled for sale.



Red Naomi roses ready to ship

Once prepared for sale, cut roses are stored in buckets of water in refrigerated coolers until they are shipped in refrigerated trucks or by air freight to florists and retail vendors. Temperatures must be regulated with

care since too high of temperatures can result in lower quality blooms.

So what makes Len Busch Roses and other domestically-grown roses better than foreign imports? “**Our roses get better with age!**” exclaims Busch. Roses from overseas travel 5 to 7 days to get here...so they are old by the time you buy them.

Keep our growers going....insist on American-grown cut roses!