

Roses and More Roses!

Roses, their history and care, have merited a book or two, hundreds in fact. In “Notes for Shrubs and ever-greens” John Evelyn (1620-1706) lists a round dozen under the ‘roses’ heading. Some- “Damasque, Red, Province, Rosa Mundi” are still familiar to rose lovers. One of his directions is to “Try if the Rose will take upon the Almond, to produce early flowers, or being budded on the Holly, phillnea or Yew, bring a greene flower”. Like all of us, this early horticulturist loved experimenting to see if he could make plants from plants.

Budding is a form of grafting in which a vegetative bud is grafted onto another plant. Grafting was done by Evelyn according to his directions to “graffe several sorts of Apples & peares on the same stock, for Curiosity” and of course until the current trend for buying ‘own-root’ plants, roses were usually grafted on hardy stock of less exalted parentage. Problems arose when the grafted stem died and inferior sorts flourished from the roots. However, not all roses do well in all climates when on their own roots. Some hybrid teas need the protection afforded by a sturdier rootstock.

Other ways of having homemade roses include sowing seeds and propagating from cuttings. Softwood cuttings can be rooted from the first flush of bloom until summer and hardwood cuttings can be started in fall. Fall is also time to sow seeds in containers after cleaning them from their hips.

Budding can be tried in summer if you wish to bud a red rose onto a white rose bush ‘for Curiosity’ as Mr. Evelyn says. To bud from one bush to another the bud from the first plant is slipped under the flap on the second that has been formed by cutting a T in the stem. This technique was perfected by the French in the 19th century and was used by nurseries everywhere to provide lovely hybrids grafted on rootstock.

Many nurseries today have shifted to propagating by rooting cuttings. Pencil-sized stems are cut from the parent plant, dusted with a rooting hormone and tucked into a mix of sphagnum and perlite and left to grow on their own roots. When one of my shrub roses was ‘voled’ I raised new ones from cuttings, not realizing that it was patented and therefore not supposed to be propagated. I haven’t been able to find out if that prohibition is for commercial use or can a home gardener be sued?

If you are cutting a series of three-inch segments from a long stem cut the top end in a slant and the bottom flat so you will insert them right side up. The roots will grow from the bottom, flat, end inserted 1/3 to 1/2 its length. If you prepare a place outdoors in a shaded spot you can work potting soil into the top six inches or you can start them in pots. Either way they should have a quart jar over them. Covered they must not be exposed to sun or they will cook. A tug will tell you if they are rooted in a month or so and then the covers come off. They may be transplanted a year later. Own-root roses can live for decades longer than T-budded ones, making them a better investment?

There is also change in the aesthetics of growing roses. Palaces and estates were renowned for their rose gardens; for example, the Empress Josephine made sure Napoleon allowed safe passage during wartime of the English ship bringing roses to Malmaison, where roses had their specially designed ambience. Today the queen of flowers has joined the commoners! The development of landscape roses has provided plants designed to need less care and to serve as ground cover, hedge, or accents in perennial beds.

Genes from old roses have brought fragrance back to modern roses with long bloom time and disease resistance. By definition, an 'old' rose is one that was in existence before 1867, the date the first hybrid tea, 'La France', appeared. Beloved always, roses are better than ever!

MAY 31 DEADLINE COMING!

The next Master Gardener Class begins September 3 and ends November 14 and you can download an application from <http://www.yorkcounty.gov/vce>. The fall class will be held at Northside Christian Church, 1213 George Washington Memorial Hwy, York County. Classes are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from nine until noon.

If you have been wanting to be a volunteer and learn lots of new things, this is your opportunity to find out about pruning and trees, pest management and fertilizers, roses and vegetables! To register or for information, call Hampton (757) 727-1401; York (757) 890-4940; Gloucester (804) 693-2602; Newport News 9757) 591-4838.

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