

A short guide to the classification of roses

Article from the Daily Telegraph, by Ambra Edwards: Best roses for the garden.

Most rosarians begin by generally sorting roses into three groups.

1 SPECIES ROSES

First are the species roses, which remain, more or less, as nature intended. For what could improve on the bee-friendly blood-red single blooms of *Rosa moyesii* or the subtle purple-grey foliage of indestructible *Rosa glauca*, both with the bonus of glossy red hips?

What will cover a wall with more grace than the yellow form of the Banksian rose, *Rosa banksiae 'Lutea'*? Although your wall will need to be a big one. These are easy, vigorous, trouble-free roses that are happy in informal garden settings.

2 OLD ROSES

Then come the old roses, unhelpfully defined as any that belong to a class that existed before modern roses were introduced (that is, before the 1860s).

So some are incredibly ancient, known to have graced the gardens of classical Greece, Rome, Persia or China, while a great many more made their appearance in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

What they have in common is that they make large, graceful shrubs, and usually put on a spectacular, but once-only, display of bloom in summer. The flowers come in many forms, and are usually in the white to pink to crimson spectrum, and richly fragrant. Among the many different families of old roses, these are perhaps the most distinctive:

Gallica roses These are the oldest of garden roses, grown for centuries for their medicinal qualities. The Apothecary's Rose, *R. gallica* var. *officinalis*, is the original red rose of Lancaster.

They make compact bushes about 3ft tall, with oval, bristly, dark green leaves, and highly scented flowers held singly or in threes on slender, not-too-thorny stems.

Colours are rich and clear, from deep purple through to pink, but most striking of all is perhaps the tapioca-and-jam striped Rosa Mundi (*R. gallica 'Versicolor'*). Gallicas are a good choice for poor soils and inattentive gardeners.

Damask roses The most strongly scented roses, damasks have been grown in the Middle East since antiquity and used to make attar of roses. In ancient Greece, they were associated with the cult of Aphrodite.

Taller than gallicas (5ft), they are equally robust, but looser in growth and more thorny, with attractive pointy leaves that cluster around the blooms. There are many delicious pinks, but pure white, lemon-scented 'Madame Hardy' takes some beating.

Alba roses The Alba family retains all the delicate charm of its parent, the wild hedgerow dog-rose, along with its native toughness, being disease-resistant and easy to grow, even in partial shade.

The scented, papery blooms are usually white, blush or pale pink. Tall (5ft), upright, very leafy plants, often with greyish foliage, make ideal hosts for a small, scrambling clematis once the Alba's early blooms have faded. Double blush-pink 'Great Maiden's Blush' (also known as Cuisse de Nymphé Emue) is the best-known variety.

Moss roses These are characterised by a curious growth on the stems and buds, which varies from a sticky down to tiny prickles resembling an immature conker case.

A big hit with the Victorians, only a few have stood the test of time, principally 'William Lobb', also known as old velvet moss. This large, (6½ft-plus), lanky, dull-leaved shrub is redeemed by fragrant purple-magenta flowers that fade tastefully to lavender, then dove-grey.

For centuries, Europeans were content with white, pink or red roses that flowered only once - with one exception, the repeat flowering autumn damask.

Then, towards the end of the 18th century, the first roses began to appear from China, bringing with them the promise of new colours (pure reds and yellows); shiny foliage; and, above all, a mutation that permitted them to flower repeatedly.

These were used to breed repeat-flowering old roses - first the Portlands, then the Bourbons and noisettes, and finally the hybrid perpetuals, paving the way for today's modern roses.

3 MODERN ROSES

The modern rose varieties are those that have been intensively bred from the early 20th century, and repeat-flower in summer in a wide range of colours, although their fragrance has often been sacrificed in pursuit of bigger blooms and brighter colours.

Hybrid teas The hybrid tea is what most people think of as the typical rose - a tight, high-centred, many-petalled flower, borne singly at the end of a stem. Blooms can be as big as 4¾in across, and almost any colour except blue.

The long, furled buds of hybrid teas make the world's most popular cut flowers, but they can be awkward to place in the garden, as they make gawky, ungainly shrubs.

Hybrid teas bred as climbers are justly popular, while some of the newer varieties, such as shell-pink Chandos Beauty or sumptuous red Velvet Fragrance offer the scent and disease resistance that older hybrid teas lack.

Floribundas These are the roses to choose for a mass of colour through summer. The blooms are produced in little bunches on the end of each stem, and as they open a few at a time, each head remains in flower for weeks.

Few have any scent. Popular varieties include Iceberg (white), Golden Wedding (yellow) and strong-growing Margaret Merrill (blush), or look out for cherry-red semi-double John Innes, introduced at Chelsea.

The English roses During the Forties nurseryman David Austin began his quest for the ideal rose that would combine the beautiful flower forms and fragrance of the old roses, with the wider colour range and repeat flowering capacity of the new.

His English roses, improved decade by decade, now also offer good disease-resistance, and many do well in conditions of heat and drought.

There are four distinct groups of English roses, all attractively formed shrubs that combine easily with other shrubs or perennials. The English old rose hybrids reproduce the fragrance and charm of their gallica and damask parents through successive flowerings.

The Leander group offers a more "modern" range of colours, including yellows, ambers and flames, and makes larger, glossier shrubs. Smaller and daintier are the English musk hybrids, with silky flowers in soft, pastel shades - perfect for formal plantings.

Finally, there are the Alba rose hybrids, with all the beautiful lightness and grace of wild roses. Many English roses, such as 'Teasing Georgia' (yellow) and A Shropshire Lad (a thornless peach) double as sturdy short climbers, ideal for today's smaller gardens.

Climbers, ramblers, scramblers

Nothing sets off a house like a rose in full bloom trained against the walls, or draping the porch. Climbers or ramblers? It all depends on space.

Most climbers are repeat-flowering and make a permanent framework of stiff stems that lend themselves to walls, pillars and pergolas. While roses enjoy sunshine, some will do on a shady north wall - try elegant pale yellow 'Maigold', or dependable Penny Lane.)

Ramblers grow bigger, producing long flexible shoots from the base that are easy to train along ropes or over arbours, with large clusters of smaller flowers in early summer. Reserve the most rampant of these, such as 'Rambling Rector', to scramble up a tree or engulf an unlovely garage or shed - these are not roses for small spaces.

Roses for containers

Patio roses come in every colour, rarely exceed 2ft high, and flower all summer. The smaller ground cover roses also take well to containers - some of the best are named after counties, such as free-flowering Surrey and Kent.

Avon Mill has a wide selection of roses available, but please contact us first before making a special trip if you require a particular rose. Call 01548 550338 or e mail us : avonmill@avonmill.com or www.avonmill.com