

Roses in Regions

By Jim Delahanty

Sometimes you bump into a concept head on. In 1985 we transferred to the Dallas area. Like English colonialists in India, we sought to recreate home-like conditions. We promptly planted the roses that were successful for us in Southern California. The roses promptly died. What could have been different besides the weather with lower lows ('blue northers') and higher highs, constant high humidity, and hardpan caliche type soil? However, it was a valuable lesson that with roses as in real estate, the most important thing is location, **location, and LOCATION.**

Clever catalogs notwithstanding, the words of Dr. J.H. Nicholas seventy years ago in the 1937 American Rose Annual remain true: 'We have not yet found, nor will we ever discover, a rose adaptable everywhere.' He termed this phenomenon 'regionality.' Austin roses that grow to a mannerly three or four feet in harsher climes tend to bloom under the eaves in Southern California. Leaves perfectly suited to a three month growing season become infected and disease-ridden in warmer climes with longer and repeat bloom cycles.

Sometimes only local rose society experience can aid the unwary in selecting and de-selecting particular rose cultivars. 'About Face,' a 2005 introduction by Weeks Roses, in which the upper yellow gold color is complimented by a deeper red reverse, grew beautifully in Sherman Oaks, but languished and sulked in the Morning Cloak Ranch area of Kern County. One difference is that the Sherman Oaks area has marine layer influences from the Sepulveda pass. *Nothing is so valuable to the novice rose grower as accurate information on the roses that do well or ill in a particular locale..*

Ventura County contains four Sunset Garden Magazine zones (21 through 24) ranging from the coolish conditions of Camarillo (aka The Fog Belt) to the searing frying pan temperatures of Simi Valley. While single roses are eminently suitable for the coastal conditions, the intense high arid heat of the interior can cause single roses to blow quickly. Contrariwise, heavily petaled roses like 'Clotilde Soupert,' are likely candidates for botrytis and balling in humid and moist areas, but are more likely to flourish in the interior climes.

Even rootstock performance varies by location. The early American Rose Annuals carried multiple articles on the effects of various rootstocks; one of the early favorites was Japanese multiflora. However, that particular understock tended to be less useful because of a comparatively short life span as well as a dislike for alkaline soils. Florida rootstocks have to be able to withstand nematodes. 'Fortuniana' rootstock produces larger flowers, but with a set of roots more inclined to spread fanwise throughout the top layers of soil; this in turn requires elaborate staking to avoid disasters during heavy wind activity. The advantage to the use of 'Fortuniana' was that the grafted plants grew with greater vigor and bloom that would otherwise be the case. For most rose growers the

understock of choice would become 'Dr Huey,' intended as a tribute to a rose mentor of Captain George C Thomas, the breeder of record.

Own root roses may provide significant surprises to rose growers in areas that the roses find congenial. Contemporaneous accounts (the 1927 American Rose Annual) indicate that a 'Lamarque' in Whittier, California grew to five feet across at the base and bore 180,000 blooms at one time. Another in Alhambra climbed some 125 feet into an adjacent tree. An earlier claim indicated the presence of similar specimens in San Gabriel. This information indicates that some care must be taken when installing these roses in your garden. If you plant 'Niles Cochet,' be prepared for multiple pruning sessions in the course of the average year.

'Earthkind' roses were initially intended to provide a list of roses that would grow in the Southern United States without any particular attention beyond planting; the ideal to be attained was a list of roses capable of not only surviving but thriving without spraying for disease or pests, fertilizing, or any care at all beyond the initial planting and possibly subsequent irrigation. The original efforts were sponsored by the Houston Rose Society and executed by the Dr. Stephen George and the Texas A & M Extension Service. This program represented an attempt to respond to modern garden conditions in which time, space and monetary constraints will become the dominant factors in the modern rose garden. Naturally, there will have to be adaptations to the list to account for localized conditions as the concept spreads to other parts of the country. Already there is a series of roses being tested in the upper Midwest areas to account for temperatures extending to such factors as temperatures 20 or 30 degrees below zero. Far different adjustments to the data or the testing will be necessary in order to accommodate the arid climates and soil alkalinity of southern California.

Most of the information necessary for successful rose gardening is only generally available from the experience of local rosarians. One of the fundamental duties of a local rose society is to share this information with each other and potential rose growers in the surrounding community. A collateral duty might be to refute inaccurate information spread by well meaning but uninformed commentators, but that is another essay for a later time.

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