

Growing Guide: Roses

Fun Facts:

- Rose bushes can be extremely long-lived. The oldest, growing in Germany, is thought to be over 1000 years old.
- Rose hips — the round red or orange fruits the plants produce in late summer — are an excellent source of vitamin C.
- Four states in the U.S. have chosen the rose as their official flower: Georgia, Iowa, New York, and North Dakota.
- A rose's thorns are, botanically speaking, "prickles." Unlike thorns, which originate from deep within a stem, prickles attach at the surface. That's why rose prickles are so easy to scrape off.
- Climbing roses don't actually climb; that is, they don't twine around a support or cling to it. Rather, they have unusually long stems, called canes, which can be tied to or woven through a trellis, arch, or other support.
- It takes about 250 pounds of rose petals to make an ounce of rose oil.
- A miniature rose plant — the variety 'Overnight Scentsation' — was a passenger aboard NASA's Space Shuttle to study gravity's effect on the plant's production of essential oils.



Few flowers inspire as much sentiment as the rose. It's a symbol of love, beauty, and peace, and is our national floral emblem. Roses grace the gardens of the fanciest estates as well as those of the most modest of homes all across the United States. Perhaps it is their delicious fragrance that captures our heart, or their delicate petals found in a rainbow of colors that catches our eye. Maybe our fondness for roses stems from memories of a special bush in a grandparent's yard or bouquets we received from loved ones as gifts. Regardless of the reason, the rose has a very special place in our landscapes and our lives.

Throughout history, roses have been the belle of the garden ball. The oldest fossil records are found in Colorado, dating back to 35 million years. Today, native rose species can be found throughout the Northern Hemisphere. Records suggested that human cultivation of roses began 5,000 years ago in China, but quickly spread throughout the civilized world.

Although sometimes used for food and medicine, roses were mainly grown for more decorative purposes. Roses were found in Egyptian tombs, probably used both as a sign of remembrance and for their fragrance. The Romans scattered rose petals with great extravagance on floors of royalty and used them as confetti at celebrations. At times their perceived value allowed them to be used to barter and make payments.

An Extravagance of Choices

There are over 150 identified species of roses. They are grouped in the same family as many important food crops, including apples,

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pears, and strawberries. Most are woody shrubs of varying heights, but there are also climbing roses with extra-long canes. Rose flowers vary greatly in appearance and fragrance, but tend to have petals in multiples of five. Some bloom only once a year, while others bloom continuously throughout warmer months. Additionally most have thorns, although the size and number of thorns is also variable.

Because of the great interest in the rose, rose plants have been the focus of plant breeders for thousands of years. Through controlled reproduction, plants were developed possessing desired characteristics such as larger flowers, fewer thorns, longer bloom times and more vibrant colors.

Roses developed with the help of human selection are often referred to as cultivated roses and include hybrid tea roses, floribunda roses, and grandiflora roses. Those that evolved naturally are known as species roses. Species roses (also sometimes called antique and heirloom) are often easier to grow and more pest resistant because they developed characteristics to help them survive in their environment, rather than those pleasing to humans.

When choosing roses for a garden, always search for varieties adapted to grow well in your region. By choosing naturally vigorous roses, you will dramatically decrease the amount of care they require.

You have the option of purchasing plants in containers or, if you're buying them in early spring, you can purchase them bare-root (in a dormant state, with their roots packed in moist peat moss or paper).

Here are just a few of the many rose options:

Hybrid tea roses have remained some of the most popular, but they aren't necessarily the best choices for schoolyards and home landscapes: They produce long stems, sometimes with a single, stunning bloom (like you'd find at a florist). However, they tend to be a bit fussy, and they're susceptible to diseases, especially black spot, in humid regions. The shrubs aren't particularly attractive either, and must be cut back hard each year.

Knock Out® Roses is a family of varieties that are relatively disease-resistant and rebloom every five to six weeks. They're available in a range of flower colors and most are hardy in zones 5-11. (Knock Out Red Razz is pictured above, in the circle image.)

Flower Carpet® Roses grow about 2' tall and can be used as a groundcover or in a mass planting. Relatively disease-resistant and available in a range of flower colors.

Rosa rugosa are especially dense and prickly; planted closely together they create a nearly impenetrable barrier.

Site Selection

In general, roses require a location that's sunny at least six hours a day. Ideally, the location should provide good air circulation and receive morning sun to help dry off leaves early in the day. Too much shade encourages disease problems. If the shade is produced by mature trees, their extensive root systems will rob nutrients from the roses, a situation that results in few flowers and weak plants. Before planting roses, you want to take time to improve the soil. A well-draining, nutrient-rich soil will increase your success rate enormously. Standard care includes watering, fertilizing, protecting against pests and diseases, and pruning. Most roses need regular applications of water for best results.

Keep in mind that all roses have thorns (or prickles) so you'll want to plant them away from where most of your gardening activities take place.

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