



When we look with anticipation at all of the new plants out there, our national flower, the rose, is no exception. It is a well-loved, beautiful flower with a long history of representing love and romance. We all want to have a bit of that beauty in our everyday lives, to enjoy in our gardens – ah, the fragrance, the color, and let's not forget the horrid reputation for health and maintenance. Many nursery companies are striving to change that reputation through new and better offerings. What does that mean? Hopefully over the next few years, as the newly developed roses become available, they will lose a bit of their Prima Dona standing in our landscapes and gardens. What criteria are used for choosing new roses? According to Ping Lim - rose hybridizer for Bailey Nurseries - disease resistance, hardiness, habit, flower color and form, and fragrance, all of these elements should work together in each new rose to form an exhilarating life force.

Disease resistance is rated as the #1 factor in choosing potential new plants for breeding and/or hybridizing. With roses, the two most frequent and consistent problems are black spot and powdery mildew. Both require spray application, of appropriate products, throughout the season for control. A missed spray and favorable conditions can render a beautiful, lush rose bush into a sniveling, sick pile of sticks. Disease resistance is harder to breed into a line of plants than other, more superficial - yet important qualities - color for instance. Some roses that are coming up winners in the disease resistance area are Rosa 'Knock Out' – which has looked fantastic under some of the most adverse heat and moisture conditions. Two others that have shown continuously clean and vigorous foliage (as well as wonderful blooms) are Rosa 'Funny Face' which has fun pink and white coloring on the flower petals and Rosa 'Hot Wonder', a fluorescent hot pink continuous bloomer.

Hardiness in many roses, or lack thereof, is one of the main reasons people tell me they don't rely on roses as good troopers in the landscape. Often, in the past, roses available have been marginally hardy for this area, requiring a lot of care from the end of one season to the beginning of the next to get them through our intensely variable winters. There is the mulching (ok that is still always a good idea), or slowly hilling dirt around the bush until it was basically submerged in a mound of earth, or digging a trench and laying the climbing or tree roses into it, covering with soil and other organic material, or lastly, the always interesting foam cones. By the time roses are completely prepared for winter, how much can you really like them? Especially when there is only about three months before you have to reverse the entire preparation process to get ready for the arrival of spring. One new development area that is promising great things for the future of roses for us lazy gardeners is own root.

What does that mean? Most roses are two separate plants grafted, or joined together. The hardier plant material, often with much less attractive flowering habits, provides a strong base for root and lower stem growth while the top pretty part, although often less hardy, performs the wonderfully shallow duties of providing consistent flowering and fragrance. If the flowering portion of a grafted rose dies completely back to the root stock, the flower performance will not be the same as it will then grow from that less attractive root stock. Own root means it is one plant all the way through. The root strength and the flower performance are from one plant, so even if the rose dies completely back, performance expectations should not change. The rose purchased is what you will continue to enjoy for many years. New in the cold hardy rose categories is a wonderful tree rose that does not have to be trenched for winter survival. Rosa 'Northern Encore' tree rose can attain and maintain good heights – 4' to 6' even given our delightful winters. Rosa 'Paint the Town' is a very pretty and hardy deep red everblooming double shrub rose that is a reliable performer in zone 4. Rosa 'Sunrise Sunset' is a lower growing shrub rose with fuschia pink blooms exhibiting a center touch of apricot that also does very well in zone 4 - with the additional interest of more intense coloring in cooler weather.

Habit, color and fragrance are all important to varying degrees and because these qualities are so subjective, providing the right combination can be a tough call. Fragrance is becoming more important in the breeding and hybridizing programs. We gardeners are craving and demanding multi-sensory stimulation from our plants. A new rose that is making a nose for itself is Rosa 'Kiss Me' – a pretty pink that is similar in appearance to an English rose. Let's not forget an old favorite, Rosa 'Hansa', an old style shrub rose that has a very intense spicy scent to the bright magenta blooms. Desired habit is really a matter of placement and that is so very dependent on each individual landscape. If you are looking for a wall of roses – try Rosa 'Great Wall', it can provide a healthy hedge of very deep pink blooms. Or if you are looking for a rose that rambles so much it is almost a climber, check out Rosa 'New Dawn' – a pale pink, almost white blush rose that has done very well through zone 4 winters with minimal effort. It has a very nice flowering habit all along the very long (12', at three years old) stems.

All of the characteristics that rose breeders and hybridizers are striving to achieve are those that the consumer has expressed a need or desire for. And boy, do we want it all – beauty, fragrance, disease resistance, good structure and low maintenance. A big hat's off to all of those that work so hard to provide it for us happy little dirt diggers.