

## HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

# OLD GARDEN ROSES BLOOM IN FLORIDA

Believe it or not, you can grow beautiful roses in your Florida landscape. The key to success is the variety of roses you select. By planting old-garden or heritage roses in your garden, you can put away the spray can. These roses are low-maintenance and will retain most of their foliage and bloom throughout the year.

In Florida, most of us think roses are high-maintenance plants, with good-looking plants only obtained when they are cared for properly. They require grooming over a long blooming period and require weekly applications of fungicide to control the leaf disease called black spot. And this is all true -- for the hybrid tea roses. But for those of us who cannot spend time in the garden each week, growing hybrid tea roses is out of the question. It's a good thing there are alternatives with the carefree, old-garden rose varieties.

Master Gardener volunteer Carolyn Lamond relates her first experience with growing the hybrid tea roses in Florida: "When I became a Master Gardener, I couldn't wait to start planting roses. I ran off to the nearest garden center and bought a bunch. Well, it didn't turn out to be such a happy experience. I sprayed every week for fungus and insects, fertilized every other week and watered, watered and watered. The roses lasted about four years and then began to croak. What went wrong? I thought a rose was a rose, and it did not matter that I had to grow certain ones to be successful. WRONG. It is imperative to be aware of which ones will do well in Florida."

She continues to describe the history of roses: "When the floral industry emerged, the hybrid tea roses became popular for the making of bouquets and corsages, and the old roses found in landscapes were ignored. In the latter part of the 20th century, however, rose lovers began to discover large rose bushes thriving in old abandoned houses, fields, cemeteries and churchyards. Rose experts began to identify the roses, and renewed interest arose in using them for landscape purposes. They lend themselves for landscaping because they have lots of foliage, bloom continuously, require little care and are very fragrant."

Old-garden roses are categorized in classes according to their particular growth habit. The best classes for Florida are Species, China, Tea (not to be confused with hybrid tea), and Noisette. All of these classes evolved in climates similar to Florida, hence their great performance in our landscapes.

Many of the old-garden roses will grow into substantial shrubs with the warm climate in Central Florida. Once established, they are far more drought-tolerant than modern hybrid tea roses. They will flower prolifically throughout the year, often with attractive fragrances and a stunning color range with subtle variations in tints and shading. Often the blooms are of more than one hue and can change with time and temperature on the same plant, giving these roses a certain appeal of their own.

Plant roses where they will get direct sunlight for at least six hours a day. Where some shading cannot be avoided, locations that supply morning sunlight are best. Morning sun will dry dew on the leaves and reduce the chance for black spot infection. Open locations are preferable because roots of nearby plants will compete with those of roses for available nutrients and moisture.

The best soil for growing roses is one that has good drainage, that allows air and water movement to and from roots, and that will hold an adequate supply of moisture and nutrients. Roses should not be planted in poorly drained bog or marsh areas. Minor drainage problems of low areas can be improved by ditching or by raising the bed level several inches.

You can see some great specimens of the old-garden roses right here in Osceola County. Quite a few varieties are in the landscape demonstration garden of the Osceola County Master Gardeners at the Extension Services building in Osceola Heritage Park.

The old-garden roses are sometimes more difficult to find at local nurseries. You may have to call around to find a place that carries them in stock. Currently, the Master Gardeners have some for sale in limited quantities at the Extension Services building. Call 321-697-3000 for more information.

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