



Photo: Antique Rose Emporium

'Swamp Rose' is the perfect choice for a pond or reflection pool.

Time to Re-Think Roses

With so many of our beloved plants failing under the combined stresses of the worst heat and drought in our state's recorded history, it is nice to hear about the few things that seemed to take the extremes of last year's weather in stride. What may come as a surprise to many of us who garden is one of the most successful plants at fending off the ravages of the heat and drought of 2011 was the rose. That's right. Many of the roses that we have grown here in Texas for many, many years continued to thrive and inspire, while other of our time-tested plants withered and died.

Not all roses were equally successful. Many of the modern hybrids that are grown for nothing more than their big, pretty flowers died right along with the other annuals and perennials that fill our beds and borders. No, the roses that survived the drought of 2011 were the tried-and-true varieties of roses that are now collectively called "Antique Roses."

ANTIQUÉ ROSES

So what exactly is an Antique Rose and what is it that allowed them to survive the extremes of last year's weather? According to a publication by the University of Florida, Central Florida Extension

BY JAY WHITE
Contributing Writer

office, entitled "What is an Antique Rose," an antique rose is "generally considered to be a rose that was introduced before 1867, when modern Hybrid Tea Roses were first introduced. Most Old Garden Rose collectors embrace any rose that is more than 75 years old or display characteristics of the Antique Rose. Some of those characteristics would include the wonderful fragrance that these roses offer, their ease of cultivation and the beauty that they lend to the landscape. Many modern hybrids lack the great perfume scent that Antique Roses carry. Also, Antique Roses often make great specimen plants, holding their own in the landscape with little care. Antique Roses are known to have healthy, attractive foliage with little incidence of disease throughout the year. The flowers of the Antique Rose are more muted or subtle in color than most modern roses."

The term antique rose is a relatively new invention. While no one is exactly sure who coined the term, there can be no doubt as to who made it famous. Mike Shoup, owner of the Antique Rose Emporium (ARE) in Independence, has done more for Antique Roses than any other individual in history. "The A-R-E," as it is called by its many fans, was established in 1984 as a way to re-introduce these time-tested roses to the landscape market. Mike has been finding, growing, selling and promoting

"Antique Roses" for more than a quarter century. His lifetime accomplishments were recently recognized when he and the ARE were inducted into the "Great Rosarians of the World" Rose Garden Hall of Fame.

Mike was not always a rose lover. Armed with a Masters of Horticulture from Texas A&M University, he started a traditional nursery in 1977. The nursery was successful but he quickly became bored producing the same pittosporum and jasmine that everyone else was growing. He began to look for a niche to differentiate himself from his competitors. While looking for this niche, he happened upon a huge white rose bush growing on an abandoned home site. He took cuttings and propagated it. Through research he was able to identify this tough and beautiful rose as 'Mermaid.' He was captivated by this large, sprawling beauty that had apparently been growing for many years without the aid of a gardener. Like many of us, until this chance encounter he thought of roses as a bit of a botanical bother. In his mind, they were a common bush with a thousand flowers that needed constant care and feeding. They were prone to infection and infestations of every sort, and they had to be trimmed and pruned just the right way at just the right time. 'Mermaid' dispelled everything that he thought he knew about

roses. When he discovered that 'Mermaid' was not available in the nursery trade, he became convinced that there was a market for these beautiful, low-maintenance survivors.

For the next few years he, his staff and a group of fellow rosarians (who eventually became known as the Rose Rustlers) began scouring the back roads of Central Texas in search of more of these living antiques. They found them in old established gardens, cemeteries and on abandoned home sites. During this time, he was able to find, grow and name about 35 roses that were no longer in commercial production. This small collection of "found roses" changed Mike Shoup and the rose industry forever. He became convinced that, contrary to his old beliefs, these roses were true superstars that anyone could grow. He felt that the traits of the Antique Roses were so superior to those of their modern hybrid cousins that he was willing to stake his financial future on it.

Mike is quick to point out that these old roses survived the drought for one reason; they were bred to survive drought.

DURABILITY

Mother Nature does a good job of culling the weak. The old roses that Mike originally found survived on their own for decades because their genetics made them uniquely adaptable to our unforgiving climate. The roses that he found also possessed natural defenses to many of the pests that plague the modern hybrids.

Many of the gardeners I know don't grow traditional hybrid roses anymore because they are just too much work. A frustrated former rose-growing friend of mine said he quit trying to grow roses because they were "expensive pets that were just looking for a place to die." I think that sums up how a lot of us have felt about roses at one time or another. Modern hybrids have been bred to produce uniform shrubs with upright canes that are covered in big, bright showy flowers. Modern rose breeders have been very successful cre-

ating this type of rose. However, it came at a cost. Fragrance and disease resistance are recessive traits in these plants. In order to produce uniform flowers that look good in a vase, scent and durability were sacrificed for form. That is why many of the modern hybrids are "looking for a place to die." All of their natural resistance to the most common rose pests (powdery mildew, black spot, rust, downy mildew and canker) has been bred out of them.

The breeders of old roses also had a huge affection for fragrance. While they were breeding their plants for durability, they were also selecting for fragrance. The next time you see a bouquet of long-stemmed red roses, smell them. Next, find an Antique Rose growing in someone's garden and smell it. There is simply no comparison. An Antique Rose smells like a rose is supposed to smell. Fragrance is one of the things most mentioned when people are asked what they love about roses. If you doubt the importance that fragrance plays in roses, blindfold a young child and take her into the garden. Let her smell the different plants that you have growing and get her to guess what they are. She may not recognize the sweet scent of jasmine or the musky smell of cleome, but I am willing to bet she will instantly be able to identify the roses.

The history of the ARE is peppered with stories of finding these living antiques in cemeteries and on abandoned home sites. While many of the early varieties were found in this manner, a lot of them came to ARE from the gardens of simple, rural gardeners willing to share the plants they loved with others. Typically, these gardeners received their roses as a passalongs from someone years before. They continued to grow these beauties because they were beautiful, reliable plants that didn't require a lot of maintenance. These gardeners did not have the time, desire or the resources to grow plants that required special treatment. Instead, they put their efforts into growing plants of all types that required little more than watering. A classic example of this is



Photo: Joy White

Mike Shoup, founder of the Antique Rose Emporium, working in the rose garden.

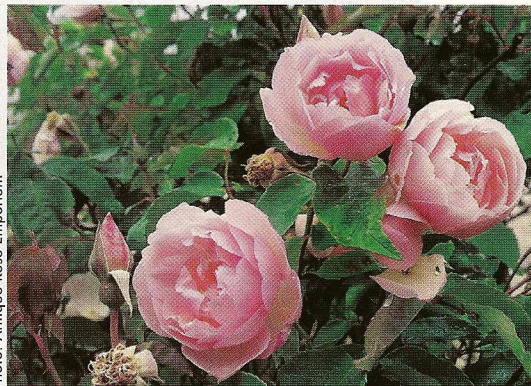


Photo: Antique Rose Emporium

'Duchess de Brabant.'



Photo: Antique Rose Emporium

'Souvenir de la Malmaison' (above).
'Caldwell Pink' (below).



Photo: Antique Rose Emporium

the 'Martha Gonzales' rose. This rose was shared with Mike by the late Martha Gonzales of Navasota. Her Antique Rose took the industry by storm. Once released, the sweetly perfumed, semi-double red flowers, beautiful reddish-purple new growth and ease of care quickly made it a favorite of the landscape industry. The 'Martha Gonzales' Rose was so successful that it quickly became one of the ARE's bestsellers.

FLEXIBILITY

The traditional rose garden is full of uniform bushes grown in rows like little soldiers. They are segregated from other plants and their beds are devoid of any competing plant material. This is the exact opposite of how you can and should use Antique Roses in your own garden. The magic of the old roses is that their diverse forms literally beg you to use them in many different ways throughout your gardens.

'Old Blush' is a classic example. 'Old Blush' has been a top-seller at the ARE for the past 25 years. While technically a shrub rose, 'Old Blush' can be used as a stunning specimen plant, a hedge or a climber. Plant 'Old Blush' on a

'Old Blush' has been a top-seller at the Antique Rose Emporium for the past 25 years.

fence or arbor and in no time at all it will become a stunning focal point in the garden. Like many of the old varieties, 'Old Blush' blooms most prolifically in the spring and then again in the fall. However, it is not uncommon for this plant to continue to produce flowers from early spring right up to the first freeze.

Old roses can make artists out of every gardener. Even though catalogs tell us the best "kept" size for a variety, most of these roses will grow bigger and wider than the catalogs say. Because of this, you can harness the rose to fit into a variety of garden situations. Left untended, some of these roses will grow into bushes that are 6' tall and 6' wide. If you are looking for an eye-catching standalone plant, this is fine. However, if you would rather use that rose as a foundation plant against your home, feel free to prune it to a size that fits your space.

CARE

When you buy a modern hybrid rose you should get an instruction manual with it. Many of these modern roses require you to feed them a certain mix at a certain time. Then you have to spray for

bugs and then again for disease. After you have done all of that, you have to prune them in a certain way at a certain time. With all of those rules, it is no wonder that many people don't want to fool with modern roses.

Antique Roses allow you to throw that rule book away. These plants can be grown just like any of the other perennial shrubs you have. Simply plant them, water them and feed them occasionally and they will give you years of beautiful service. This is not to say that they don't require care. It is just that they are much less demanding and much more forgiving than the modern varieties.

When planting an antique rose, place it in well-worked soil with good drainage. While antique roses can survive drought, they do not like wet feet. Water often while getting your plants established. After a few months, cut back the water to about one inch every five days. If you want to grow plants that can survive our summers, it is better to do a deep watering once a week than several shallow waterings throughout the week.

All roses are fairly heavy feeders; so you will want to feed them. If you are an organic grower, add compost to your bed twice a year. They also respond well to a foliar application of compost tea. If you want to use a commercial fertilizer, something like a 5-5-5 works best. Fertilizers with higher nutrient contents (like a 20-20-20) can burn roses.

Pruning is the area where most of my gardening friends feel they lack qualifications. First, with the exception of dead cane removal, Antique Roses don't have to be pruned. However, if you want to keep the size of the rose in check, you will have to prune. Do not fear pruning. These roses are so durable that it is almost impossible to prune them incorrectly.

There are two times a year that are best for pruning. The first is in early spring (late February or early March), just before new growth sets in. The spring pruning can be ruthless. Feel free to take your electric hedge trimmers to them. Don't worry about taking off too



Photo: Chris S. Corby

much foliage. The roots have been storing nutrients all winter and a good pruning will allow all of those stored nutrients to make your plants explode with new growth and flowers on the remaining canes. The second time to prune is around Labor Day. This fall pruning is when you do your gentle shaping. The fall pruning should be a time of controlling the chaos that resulted from the spring and summer growth.

Climbing roses require the most pruning. However, they also provide you with the biggest impact in the garden. Climbing roses are the drama in any garden and, as such, deserve a little extra attention. Climbers should be grown on sturdy structures because the mature plants can be very heavy. As the climbing rose works its way up your trellis, tie the canes securely to the structure. With a little effort you can train them to grow in an attractive criss-cross fashion. If canes grow inward, trim them back. Canes should not snag you or your kids when they are walking under or through them. When pruning climbers, you can reduce their volume by 50 percent.

Antique Roses are carefree survivors from the past that are reclaiming their rightful place as the backbone of many Texas gardens. This past year was proof positive that these living antiques can survive the worst weather imaginable. They can defend themselves against most pests and still produce blooms for four to six months of the year. Combining these traits with their fragrance and diversity of form allows them to be used as "the clay" that the gardener molds to shape his garden. Like Mike Shoup is fond of saying, "Don't plant a rose garden, plant a garden that is full of roses." With all that Antique Roses have to offer, who can argue? **TG**

Jay White is a full-time computer specialist for the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, and he is completing an M.S. in Horticulture at Texas A&M. In his spare time he gardens and maintains "The Masters of Horticulture" blog at <http://www.masterofhort.com/>.



Photo: Chris S. Corby

'Mutabilis' is often called the butterfly rose because its multi-colored flowers look like butterflies clustered on the foliage.

SHOUP'S TOP FIVE ROSES

White Lady Banks. This large, thornless, sprawling beauty explodes with very fragrant white flowers in the early spring. Lady Banks is a climbing rose that needs room to run. Give her a fence, trellis or out building to cover and her spring show will literally stop traffic. There is also a yellow form that is just as lovely, but the fragrance is not as strong as the white.

Duchess de Brabant. With round, cabbage-shaped pink flowers and deep, rich scent, the Duchess has been a favorite of gardeners since 1857. President Teddy Roosevelt loved it so much that he often wore it as his boutonniere. The blooms have a lovely dropping habit that make this plant a romantic addition to your garden. This shrub can grow to five feet and is easy to grow.

Caldwell Pink. 'Caldwell Pink' is one of the signature plants of the Antique Rose Emporium. As the name implies, it was found in Caldwell, Texas, in the very earliest days of the ARE. Caldwell Pink is one of the last roses to

bloom, but once it starts, the blooms last well into the fall. 'Caldwell Pink' is a short bush-type rose that can be kept to a neat three feet. This rose is also great in the fall as its foliage is flush with the reds, yellows and orange of autumn.

Souvenir de la Malmaison. This 1843 classic produces roses that look the way antique roses are supposed to look. The large pink flowers, with the deep musky smell of the damasks, makes a great cut flower. This rose is a prolific repeat bloomer that grows on a large bush that can grow to six feet.

Swamp Rose. The 'Swamp Rose' is native to the moist, swampy parts of the Southern and Eastern U.S. This rose will grow, as well, in the shade or in standing water as it will in the improved bed. The cascading shrub is lovely all year round and its unique growth habit makes it the perfect choice for your pond or reflecting pool. The vivid, double pink blooms of 'Swamp Rose' after many other roses have finished blooming.