

# American Beauty Rose

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What if there was a rose that had the elegant look and feel of an antique garden rose, but the vase life of a classic greenhouse rose? And just to make it more interesting, what if one were able to grow this rose outside? These were the questions I was asking when I set off on my quest to find the perfect rose to use in my floral arrangements.

Two years ago I opened floreto, a small floral design business specializing in unique, sustainably grown, seasonal arrangements. I started filling our property with as many varieties of flowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees as I could find. Some of them were the more obvious, tried and true varieties. But as time went on my main focus has shifted to the more unusual, unique and exotic - the more uncommon the better.

My plant decisions were made by scouring hundreds of catalogs, web sites and books. Putting together a production garden filled with the unique ingredients for the arrangements I make was not an easy task. A lot of the information I gleaned came from books out of England. But ultimately I decided that to have a steady stream of fabulous plant material for my bouquets, I was going to have to grow it myself. And to be sure the plants I chose would work in our climate I would also need to do a fair amount of trialing. In Mt. Vernon, Washington, our weather falls within a solid Zone 7, but delivers the complexity of famously wet winters and then relatively sunny, dry days and cool nights in the summer.

I grow on what could only generously be called a mini-farm (one acre). It's actually closer to a large cutting garden. We are located about an hour north of Seattle in the fertile Skagit Valley. But from this small piece of land I am able to provide an abundance of European style floral arrangements for parties, weddings, weekly corporate accounts and gifts. As a floral designer I am committed to using local, sustainably-grown flowers and plant material in all of my work. So I have made a point to

limit the amount of out-of-season, out-of-country flowers I incorporate in any arrangement "think orchids" to no more than ten percent of the total used.

## Ramble on Rose

One thing that has haunted me from the beginning has been the ability to find and/or grow the right roses for long-lasting cut flower arrangements. So far no one locally is commercially growing garden style roses for cuts and I haven't seen anything among the traditionally available florist roses that looks natural enough for my tastes. So last winter I decided to put together a trial of my own. I ordered more than 40 English rose varieties, planted dozens of old and heirloom varieties whose qualities I loved and then laid in a test bed of 50 German roses that had just passed U.S. quarantine. This is only their first season in the ground here, but a few of the German varieties we tried have already risen to the top of my favorites list. Here is what I have gathered this far.



I learned that Kordes Sohne, a rose breeder out of Germany had developed a new line of outdoor cut roses called the Cutting Garden™ collection, which were reported to be

disease resistant, come in an enormous range of colors and styles and have an unbelievably long vase life for an outdoor rose. In their literature they explained that the demand for elegant, old-fashioned style cut roses that can only come from being grown outside was increasing and that the Cutting Garden™ varieties were developed in response to that need. In Europe the idea has really taken off.

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average of 35 stems from their ‘Caramel Antique’ plants, an average of 42 from ‘Eliza’, an average of 28 from ‘Fantasia Mondiale’ and 32 from ‘Pinguin’.”

In our garden I have not kept track of the total stem count after their first flush but buckets and buckets of roses have come out of our patch this summer. And compared to the other varieties we are growing they are insanely prolific!

### **Mighty Like a Rose**

Because we choose not use any harsh chemicals on the plants in our garden, disease and pest resistance are very important qualities we require. So far the Kordes roses have done quite well. We have had 2-3 outbreaks of mildew in this first season with them, but will try to minimize the problem next year by putting earlier preventive efforts into place to attempt to keep ahead of the problem.

Thrips have been our other principal nuisance. During the spring months we found that they were only minimally present, but by August they had established themselves enough to really bruise up a lot of our blooms. Again, we don’t blame the plants for this, and next year we will address this thrip problem much earlier, as well. When I asked Dr. Crofton Sloan if they had experienced much disease or insect pressure in his Mississippi test garden, he replied “We have extreme blackspot pressure and thrip damage and are spraying once per week.” Our experience in this climate has been much better. Despite their non-perfect health we are still very impressed with their overall performance and feel if properly cared for we could nearly eliminate these problems.

Another characteristic I was looking for was a long vase life, and I am delighted to say that these roses have it in spades. Rene at Palatine Roses reports again “...depending on variety, and cut when sepals are 60 degrees, (meaning slightly open), we find that a vase life of 8 to 15 days can be expected.”

The Kordes catalog clearly lists each variety with their estimated vase life and fragrance. The spray types range from 8 to 12 days and the single-flowered types are anywhere from 8 to 14 days. In my own experience I have found that even when we cut our blooms a bit more open we can easily expect to get a week out of them.

The one thing we find we really wish the Kordes roses had was more fragrance. Of the eight varieties we have trialed, ‘Ice Girl’ was by far the most fragrant, followed distantly by ‘Antique Caramel’ and ‘Cinderella’, which both have a faint aroma. None of the others that we are trialing seem to have much fragrance at all. I have to admit that this doesn’t really surprise me, having both read and noted in my own experience that with roses the general rule of thumb is “...the stronger the fragrance the shorter the vase life.” Besides, most typical florist rose varieties have little or no aroma either. One can still wish for such a thing, a long-lasting rose with a heady aroma.

Before these roses for our trial arrived, we thoroughly prepped the ground where we would plant them, applying a blend of fish and crab meal, well-rotted manure, lime, rock phosphate, kelp and alfalfa meal. We also laid out drip irrigation lines and covered the entire bed with landscape fabric. Then, when the plants arrived we simply tucked them into their holes and let nature do its thing.

Our Cutting Garden™ roses weren’t actually in the ground until mid April, a bit later than we would have liked, but surprisingly we began harvesting flowers off of them by the end of June. I was delighted to find that our average yield was 7-10 saleable stems per plant in just that first flush of blooms.

I contacted three other growers who were also trialing this series here in North America.

Rene Schmitz of Palatine Roses in Canada wrote back, “So far we know that 60 stems per plant per year is possible.”

Dr. Crofton Sloan from Mississippi State University wrote in a published report that even though they did not harvest stems until August in their trials, due to efforts to produce strong canes for framework, they were still able to gather an

Obviously, others' variety selections will be a matter of their personal preferences and needs. Three of the eight selections we've trialed fit the natural garden look I'm after nearly perfectly. 'Carmel Antique' is ideal for the style I'm working with right now. It has the softness and coloring of an old rose but also holds up extremely well in the vase. I find it no surprise that it is the number one seller in Germany. 'Fantasia Mondiale' is very beautiful as well, with long, elegant stems. And of the spray types we tried, 'Taifun' was awesome, such great color and texture!

During a conversation with Ralph Thurston of Bindweed Farm in Blackfoot, Idaho, he said that to his mind 'Magma' and 'Caramel Antique' were two exceptional varieties, but found the others not exhibiting the shape his particular high-end clientele wanted. Dr. Crofton Sloan shared that of the seventeen Cutting Garden™ varieties they had trialed at Mississippi State, only 'Penguin', 'Masquerade' and 'Fantasia Mondiale' looked good in their humid Mississippi heat. His top pick based on overall growth and stem count was 'Masquerade'. Finally, Rene and Eva Schmitz of Palatine Roses favored 'Caramel Antique' for its nostalgic bloom and 'Fantasia' and 'Mondiale' for their enormous amounts of stems. Eva said she particularly liked the soft color that was really different from most other roses she had grown.

It seems that depending on style, client expectations and plain old personal preference, there may be at least several options from among the thirty-seven Cutting Garden™ varieties offered to fit anyone's floral "bill".

So far my husband Chris and I are very pleased with the Cutting Garden™ roses. Their natural look, good disease resistance, excellent vase life and amazing bloom ability have earned them a prominent spot in our organic production gardens. We also feel that among the few problems we have encountered with them, manageable improvements in our gardening methods, based upon what we have learned this first season will allow us to minimize those problems in the future. I'll let you know what we discover this next time around.

*Special thanks to the following people for sharing their experiences and thoughts for this article: Dr. Crofton Sloan of North Mississippi Research & Extension Center, Mississippi State University, Rene and Eva Schmitz of Palatine Roses [www.palatineroses.com](http://www.palatineroses.com), Ralph Thurston of Bindweed Farm, and Gary Pellett of Kordes Sohne Roses, USA. <http://www.kordes.com>*

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