

Roses

by
Mike Prero

“Roses have a long and colorful history. They have been symbols of love, beauty, war, and politics. The rose is, according to fossil evidence, 35 million years old. In nature, the genus *Rosa* has some 150 species spread throughout the Northern Hemisphere, from Alaska to Mexico and including northern Africa. Garden cultivation of roses began some 5,000 years ago, probably in China. During the Roman period, roses were grown extensively in the Middle East. They were used as confetti at celebrations, for medicinal purposes, and as a source of perfume. Roman nobility established large public rose gardens in the south of Rome. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the popularity of roses seemed to rise and fall depending on gardening trends of the time.

During the fifteenth cen-



tury, the rose was used as a symbol for the factions fighting to control England. The white rose symbolized York, and the red rose symbolized Lancaster, as a result, the conflict became known as the "War of the Roses."

Roses were in such high demand during the seventeenth century that royalty considered roses or rose water as legal tender, and they were often used as barter and for payments. Napoleon's wife, Josephine, established an extensive collection of roses at Chateau de Malmaison, an estate seven miles west of Paris in the 1800s. This garden became the setting for Pierre Joseph Redoute's work as a botanical illustrator. In 1824, he completed his watercolor collection "Les Rose," which is still considered one of the finest records of botanical illustration.

It wasn't until the late eighteenth century that culti-

vated roses were introduced into Europe from China. Most modern-day roses can be traced back to this ancestry. These introductions were repeat bloomers, making them unusual and of great interest to hybridizers, setting the stage for breeding work with native roses to select for hardiness and a long bloom season. Many of these early efforts by plant breeders are of great interest to today's gardeners.

Roses are once again enjoying a resurgence in popularity, specifically, shrub roses and old garden roses. Gardeners realize that these roses fit the lifestyle of today's gardeners who want roses that are not as demanding with regard to disease control, offer excellent floral quality, have excellent winter hardiness, and fit into shrub borders and perennial gardens without seeming out of place.” [<https://extension.illinois.edu/roses/history.cfm>]

Rose covers, by the very nature of the rose, tend to be quite colorful, and thus attractive. Most roses pictured, perhaps not surprisingly, are of the red variety, but certainly anyone who does any gardening at all knows that they come in a wide variety of colors, and some are even multicolored. In my own garden, for example, I have a red and yellow rose, and a red and white rose.

Roses, at least here in the US, have come to be associated with love and romance, and are a staple of every florist. In 2010, 110 million roses were sold...just for Valentine's Day...and men are 75% of the ones purchasing those roses [*and I can attest that roses have gotten men out of a lot of problems with wives and girlfriends!*]

Stella Williams, OH, had 958 Rose covers in her collection as of January 2016, and Stella was the one who actually got me interested in the category. Now, it's one of my favorites...I mean, who doesn't like roses?!

