

The Art of the Rose

Flammarion



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Translated from the French by Sheila O'Leary
Copyediting: Helen Woodhall
Proofreading: Susan Schneider
Design: Ariane Aubert
Typesetting: Claude-Olivier Four

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Jérôme Goutier

Photographs by the Horizon agency

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Foreword

The rose is recognized as the king of flowers almost the world over. China is perhaps the only exception to this universal rule.

The appeal of roses lies not just with their fragrance, but also with their hue, ranging from delicate porcelain to bright, almost startling shades, as well as with their multitudinous forms. Roses come in all shapes and sizes and there is a world of difference between the simple beauty of a dog rose and the tangle of unkempt petals that makes a double rose look more like a peony. Often, the same variety of rose gives a progressive pleasure as the flower metamorphoses: from the first bud through the opening of the bloom, to the shedding of the last flower, spectacular changes in form and color provide a stunning spectacle. And the spectacle varies depending on the nature of the soil, the exposition of the plant, the weather, and of course the season.

Facing page: *A combination of modern and old roses: 'Fritz Nobis' and 'Orpheline de Juillet.'*

Rose breeders have succeeded in sculpting and modeling roses to suit all tastes. In their task they have been helped by the plant itself, which is highly adaptable and can flourish not only under all weather conditions, but also in every sort of garden ranging from narrow balconies and terraces.

It is no surprise that the rose has been so popular for so long. The search for the origins of the rose show that its popularity stretches far back in time. From antiquity to the present day, roses have been a constant favorite, and if the number of new varieties that continue to be created each year is anything to go by—each more beautiful than the next—this cultish devotion is not likely to disappear in the near future.

Note: Many of the roses featured in this book may be more prevalent in Europe than North America, but all display characteristics that will ensure they are of interest to rose lovers everywhere.



The origin of the rose

To western eyes, Europe, and particularly the Mediterranean basin, would appear to have been where roses first appeared and subsequently proliferated. However, archaeological findings have revealed that in the first century B.C.E. roses were already being used for decorative, medicinal, and cosmetic purposes in Greece, as well as in China. In addition, at the end of the eighteenth century so-called China rosebushes were being brought to Europe from the Far East. Repeat-bloomers, these rosebushes did not limit themselves to a single flowering in early summer but produced successive waves of flowers, starting in the spring and continuing into the fall, and in some particularly hot climates flowering almost year round. Rose breeders* of the time tried to introduce this feature into their new varieties and produced the repeat-flowering hybrids, a self-explanatory name, which we now refer to as “old roses*.”

Words followed by an asterisk at first occurrence appear in the glossary on page 94.

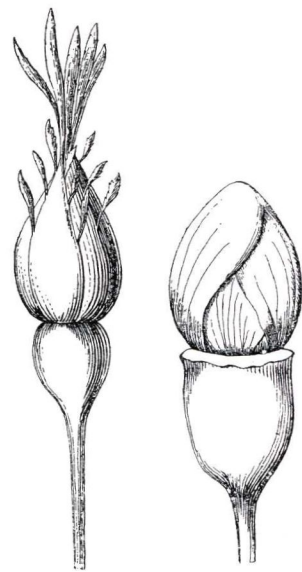
Facing page: The perfect harmony of two immaculate rosebushes.

On the trail of the first roses

Fossilization usually occurs in boggy marshland, terrain that is not favored by rosebushes, which probably explains the relative rarity of fossilized rosebushes compared to other plants. Nevertheless, some have been discovered in rock beds from the Oligocene era throughout the northern hemisphere and this dates them to around thirty-five million years ago.

Analysis of these fossilized remains points to a resemblance with two botanical species from North America with a propensity to root in water: *Rosa nutkana* and *R. palustris*, known as the Hudson rosebush or the swamp rose, which was imported to France from the United States in the eighteenth century but met with little success (though one hundred years later the painter Pierre-Joseph Redouté, best known for his paintings of the flowers at the Empress Josephine’s château at Malmaison, would go on to paint two very distinct pictures of this “fossil” rosebush).

A giant leap in time brings us from prehistoric ages to the palace of Minos in Knossos near Heraklion in Crete where the first known representation of a rose can be found painted on the “Bluebird Fresco” discovered



The bud, leaf, and flower of Rosa canina.



The flower of the wild dog rose, Rosa canina.

by the British archaeologist Arthur Evans in 1900. The artist let his imagination get the better of him, because he depicts a rose with six petals instead of the five that were undoubtedly on the model from which he worked. This palace dates to between 2000 and 1700 B.C.E.

Faced with a huge range of possibilities—and not helped by successive restorations that have altered the color of the original painting—botanists have been unable to identify with certainty the precise variety of rose represented. They hesitate between a dog rose (*Rosa canina*), a Gallica or French rose (*R. gallica*), and a holy rose (*R. sancta*). This latter, rechristened *R. × richardii*, is still often found in the vicinity of monasteries in Ethiopia.

The natural charm of wild roses

Through a process of natural cross-fertilization and deliberate hybridization, the simple dog rose that once grew wild has been transformed into the sophisticated rose that we have come to appreciate. But with the trend toward more natural gardens, wild roses have become increasingly popular, to the extent that the latest offerings from rose breeders are often a wonderful replica of the dog rose and its cousins.

All of these wild rosebushes originate in the temperate climates of the northern hemisphere, and in particular Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and North America. They have one distinct advantage: once planted, they require little further maintenance. They can be left to grow freely, and all that is needed is to cut back some of the more vigorous and unruly stems, or those which have dried out and died.

Often, wild roses* and species roses*—species being the term most often found in catalogs—are assimilated



A dog rose with petals delicately tinged with pink.

in people's minds. But there is a subtle difference between them, although, indeed, they share the characteristic of not being the result of human intervention. While the first, as their name suggests, are to be found growing wild in nature, the second, although including those from the first category, also comprise varieties* that evolved spontaneously from a particular species (following a mutation for example), as well as hybrids* that have resulted from the natural crossing of different varieties of wild rose.

Rosa × harisonii is an example of a rosebush that resulted from the crossing of two different varieties, (as denoted by the symbol “×” which is used in botany to signify a cross-breeding). Its parents are the Austrian briar (*R. foetida*) and *R. pimpinellifolia*, the Burnet or Scotch rose. The flowers—non-remontant* and yellow—are unexpectedly double, which is rare among species roses, particularly since both its ancestors have single flowers. This rose's history is linked to the settlement of North America by the early Europeans who loved it so much that they would travel with cuttings and plant it at every stage of their journey. While it is common in the United States, it is now rare in Europe, available only in a few nurseries in Germany and Britain.

In many cases though, because of their spontaneous propagation, the origins of species roses remains a mystery.

Wild and opulent ramblers

In nature, wild rosebushes sometimes take the form of ramblers, attaching themselves to trees and occasionally climbing to heights of several tens of yards. The Banks'

Facing page: *The yellow flowers of the Banks' rose, Rosa banksiae 'Lutea.'*

