

February 22, 2017



Roses... I am Tempted
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I'm thinking of planting roses this year. I am tempted. We're on our fourth garden in fifteen years and have installed many feet of irrigation, brought in truckloads of soil amendments, and enjoyed the pleasures of choosing trees, shrubs, and endless bulbs – but we have planted no roses.

Some gardeners can't imagine not having them and I've never been in that group. For years, we've been focused on plants grown for their foliage, their shape, that are natives, drought tolerant, and so on. My perception of roses has been that they're often subject to diseases and pests, don't look all that good as bushes, need lots of sun, regular water, and now that I no longer live in San Francisco, deer will come to snack just before blooms open.

Perception is not far from reality! The University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources has an integrated pest management site (<http://imp.ucanr.edu>) where you can browse the diseases (blight, black spot, mildew, rust, cankers...) and pests (aphids, scale, borers, miners, beetles, mites...) and even environmental disorders which can afflict roses. Leafing through plant catalogs, I see there are many suggestions for underplantings to disguise the leggy spindliness which can afflict rose shrubs. Seriously, roses are grown for their blossoms, not their landscape appeal, right? As for deer, we know they're charming to gaze upon until we find a precious plant has been bitten, chewed, and swallowed overnight.

I should pause and clarify that I have learned that there are two broad categories of roses. There are the landscape types and the garden types of roses. The landscape roses are those low shrubs and ground covers grown for their mass of color and not the individual blossoms. These roses are valued for their low maintenance and anecdotally, deer may leave them alone until they get really hungry. That's been my observation in my neighborhood. I also see them in street medians and public spaces where I know there are deer around. Deer will eat most anything when motivated, but I see plenty of landscape roses surviving. Maybe they're not especially tasty? Your experiences may vary.

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It's the garden rose I'm thinking of in this pondering of roses. These are the roses grown for their flowers and are the stuff of poetry and county fair competitions. Bees are attracted to roses and it's always desirable to attract pollinators, so here's a practical thumbs up for roses. The modern garden roses are primarily the hybrid tea and grandifloras, which usually have big blossoms and look swell in a vase. Commercially, more hybrid teas are sold than all other roses combined! Surveying a local nursery recently, I saw many recognizable named varieties which presumably grow well because that's what sells year after year. A serious rosarian, or more aspirational gardener, would turn to mail order sources for the harder to find specimens.

Although winter is still here, the days are no longer feeling so short. Is that spring approaching? Our attention is turning towards the outdoors. How much cleanup needs to be done and how soon can we start planting? I am feeling emboldened to plant a rose. Maybe two. Despite the drawbacks and shortcomings I've always felt plague roses in a garden, there is that thing unique to roses. You've felt the smile when leaning towards an open rose and inhaling deeply of a scent that only happens in nature, not in a bottle nor likely on Valentine's Day? I finished my Master Gardener training and am feeling up to the challenge! Perhaps like tomatoes, roses need to be home grown to realize their potential.

Research tells me garden roses are not difficult to grow. Like with all living things, a congenial environment, proper and adequate nutrition, and attention to details is required. A decent soil, sunny exposure, feeding and regular watering are what roses need to thrive. Some pests, such as common aphids are easy to manage with a spray from the hose. Other pests may require a bit more work to control, and I'll wait to see what turns up. Many diseases are fungal and the result of damp conditions. We can't do a whole lot if we get a burst of high humidity, but roses should be planted with space for air to circulate, i.e. no crowding. Overhead watering is not a good idea, watering in the morning is a good idea. While the list of bad things that may happen is long, roses have been around for thousands of years. They've been cultivated and hybridized for hundreds of years. How hard could it be?

Master Gardener Eve Keener is presenting a class this Saturday, February 25, on "Pruning for Next Years' Fabulous Rose Display" at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden in Placerville from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. The Rose Garden at SDG is amazing. I'm out of space to tell you why, but when greeting visitors at SDG, I always tell them to come again because there's always something different to see, smell, enjoy. One day last summer, the air was fantastical with the ephemeral fragrance of roses.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530)621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.