

## The Last Rose of Summer

By Susan Camp

When Jim and I moved to Gloucester 22 years ago, we planted ten rosebushes around the pergola that we had built in our field. Varieties included 'Peace', 'Queen Elizabeth', 'America', 'Don Juan', and 'New Dawn', among others. All were selected for color, fragrance, and hardiness. All, except 'New Dawn', succumbed after a few years to Japanese beetles, aphids, and black spot. We grew tired of endless hours spent caring for them, and we gave up. The last rosebush left is the incredibly resilient 'New Dawn', now residing in a bed next to our granddaughter's playhouse.

We solemnly promised each other we would never grow roses again, but when we decided to revise our front garden, we found a Colonial Williamsburg plan that included four Old Garden Roses. Old Garden Roses are those that were in existence in 1867 when 'La France', the first hybrid tea rose was discovered, setting off the Victorian craze for developing new hybrids. Growers claim that Old Garden Roses are easy to grow, hardy, and pest and disease resistant, with traditional rose fragrance, dainty blossoms, and lush, green foliage. The downside to Old Garden Roses is that many varieties bloom only once per season.

Old Garden Roses are divided into two main groups, depending on whether or not they bloom once or are re-bloomers. Each group contains five or six classes. We decided to plant the same roses that we had read about in the Colonial Williamsburg garden book, figuring that they were proven to survive in our region.

'Old Blush' (*Rosa chinensis*), grown in China before 1100 and imported to Europe hundreds of years ago, has dainty, lilac pink, sweetly scented, double flowers. It is shade-tolerant and disease resistant, but needs protection from cold temperatures.

'Autumn Damask' (*Rosa damascena*) is once-blooming and is not shade-tolerant, so we planted it in the sunniest spot in the garden. It has been blooming steadily for almost two months. 'Autumn Damask' bears semi-double clusters of medium-pink flowers with exceptional fragrance. One story has it brought to Europe from the Middle East by Crusaders, although it probably dates back to early Greek civilization.

'Apothecary's Rose' (*Rosa gallica officinalis*) is a shade-tolerant, once-blooming rose with light-red, semi-double blooms. It has been traced back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was used during the Middle Ages for medicinal purposes.

Our fourth choice was 'Rosa Mundi' (*Rosa gallica versicolor*), dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was supposedly named for the Fair Rosamund, mistress of Henry II of England. The blooms are crimson and white-striped and very fragrant. It is shade-tolerant.

Three of the roses were purchased from a company in Oregon at reasonable prices in one gallon containers. The fourth, the Apothecary's Rose, was difficult to locate on the internet. I finally found one (the last in stock!) at a small company in California that maintains a website, but conducts business by phone and traditional mail. The owner warned me that the plant would be about eight inches high. After one season it is over two feet tall.

If you are interested in planting Old Garden Roses, start searching online sites now and order early. All companies that I researched will ship the roses at the proper planting time for our region. There are many other varieties from which to choose. All Old Garden Rose specimens should be purchased own-root; that is, the root should not be grafted to a rootstock. Try to purchase plants in one to three gallon containers.

Did I mention that Old Garden Roses require a minimum of fertilizing, pruning, and pest control? That will be a topic for a future column. In the meantime, the article "Heirloom or Old Garden Roses" from the VCE Piedmont Master Gardeners at <http://piedmontmastergardeners.org/heirloom-or-old-garden-roses/> offers descriptions, beautiful color photographs, and several locations in Virginia where you can view Old Garden Roses. The American Rose Society website contains an abundance of information on growing all types of roses.

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