

So many roses so little time

Get to know the best rose types, classes and growth habits for your garden style.

by Marilyn Wellan
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ABOUT CLASSIFICATION & REGISTRATION

Every genus in the botanic world has been assigned a registration authority – a registrar - for the species. For roses, the registrar is the American Rose Society. The Society, headquartered at Shreveport, Louisiana, is the official “International Registration Authority for Roses.”

As the official registrar, the American Rose Society is responsible for establishing the rose classification system; and also registers old and new roses in the ARS database of rose varieties. In the registration process, the ARS

- Approves rose variety names.
- Assigns colors.
- Maintains records of all roses, including some of their characteristics.
- Provides a rose history for the world.
- Publishes the data.

WHY IS PLANT CLASSIFICATION IMPORTANT?

Our discussion about rose classification - rose types, classes and growth habits - will be brief, but we will provide much that you can refer to as you develop your rose garden and add to your collection of roses. As gardeners, and as Master Gardeners, you are a “student” of plant life and the ever-evolving nature of gardening. Knowledge of the official classification system will enable gardeners to make informed decisions about rose acquisitions and garden care and to communicate with others, which we all know is the best part of gardening. When we speak a common “language,” our discussions about roses are enriched; and with more knowledge, our enjoyment of roses is greatly enhanced.

THE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

The classification system for Genus Rosa is made up of three major GROUPS of CLASSES:

- Species
- Old Garden Roses
- Modern Roses

(In the simple “Family Tree” below, abbreviations are shown as they may appear in American Rose Society publications.)

GENUS ROSA FAMILY TREE

SPECIES ROSES

Species (Sp)

OLD GARDEN ROSES

- Alba (A)
- Ayshire (Ayr)
- Bourbon & Climbing Bourbon (B)
- Boursault (Bslt)
- Centifolia (C)
- China & Climbing China (Ch)
- Damask (D)
- Hybrid Bracteata (HBc)
- Hybrid Eglanteria (HEg)
- Hybrid Foetida (HFt)
- Hybrid Gallica (HGal)
- Hybrid Multiflora (HMult)
- Hybrid Perpetual & Climbing Hybrid Perpetual (HP)
- Hybrid Sempervirens (HSem)
- Hybrid Setigera (HSet)
- Hybrid Spinosissima (HSpn)
- Miscellaneous Old Garden Roses (Misc.OGR)
- Moss & Climbing Moss (M)
- Noisette (N)
- Portland (P)
- Tea & Climbing Tea (T)

MODERN ROSES

- Floribunda & Climbing Floribunda (F)
- Grandiflora & Climbing Floribunda (Gr)
- Hybrid Kordesii (HKor)
- Hybrid Moyesii (HMoy)
- Hybrid Musk (HMSk)
- Hybrid Rugosa (HRg)
- Hybrid Tea & Climbing Hybrid Tea
- Hybrid Wichurana (HWich)
- Large-Flowered Climber (LCI)
- Miniature & Climbing Miniature (Min)
- Mini-Flora (MinFl)
- Polyantha & Climbing Polyantha (Pol)
- Shrub (S)

ABOUT CLIMBING SPORTS: Some varieties develop "sports" - variations or mutations of the original variety, exhibiting climbing characteristics. (Sports can also exhibit changes in color.)

Rose varieties that we know as "Ramblers" are usually classed as Wichurana.

Other climbers have a natural tendency to put out long canes. Those varieties are not "sports," but are classed as Large Flowered Climbers.

COLOR CLASSIFICATION

Defining color in roses is important for identification purposes. You might think that red, yellow, pink and white should be enough to describe rose colors. However, once you get to know roses, you will find that one of those basic colors does not fully describe the rose as well as you would like, or need for identification.

For example, neither red, nor white would satisfactorily describe the color of the variety 'Double Delight'. "Red blend" was therefore assigned to that beautiful rose.

The rose color "orange pink" was created to describe the tremendously popular rose 'Touch of Class', because it was neither orange, nor pink.

The rose color "russet" was a late-comer to the list of colors. It was necessary to describe some of the emerging roses which are brownish in color – one example is the new, award-winning rose 'Hot Cocoa'.

Rose varieties are assigned to a color class by the hybridizer or introducer with the approval of the Registrar. There are 18 official color classes.

ARS COLOR CLASSES

- white, white blends
- light yellow
- medium yellow
- deep yellow
- yellow blends
- apricot & apricot blends
- orange & orange blends
- orange-pink & blends
- orange-red & blends
- light pink
- medium pink
- deep pink
- pink blend
- medium red
- dark red
- red blend
- mauve & mauve blends
- russet

GETTING TO KNOW THE CLASSES

The characteristics we all want most in a rose are frequency of bloom, disease resistance, fragrance, and conformance to our home gardens and the way we want to garden. Other factors in roses that are of interest are thorny-ness, growth habit (size, climbing, rambling, ground cover, vertical, globular bush, etc.) Let's get to know the best rose types, classes and growth habits for your garden style.

SPECIES ROSES

Often referred to as "wild roses," species roses naturally occur over the entire Northern Hemisphere. They are usually single-petaled (4-12 petals), are **once-blooming** and have a bush size ranging from 2 to 20 feet. They are listed according to their Latin name, beginning with R. for *Rosa*, and can have common synonyms. For example, *R. laevigata* is known as the Cherokee Rose.

Some favorites among the Species Roses are:

R. banksiae lutea - yellow Lady Banks.

R. banksiae banksiae – white Lady Banks

These two roses are southern favorites. Among the first to bloom in late winter, with **one bloom cycle** that lasts three to four weeks. Can cover a small outbuilding building in a few years; but also can grow into a large bush with no support.

R. gallica officinalis – Apothecary's Rose

An ancient European rose. Because it is very fragrant, it was popular with apothecaries during the Middle Ages. Drought tolerant and insect resistant. **Once bloomer**; 3 to 4 feet. Like most Gallicas, this rose spreads suckers underground.

R. gallica versicolor – Rosa Mundi

Rosa Mundi – dated prior to 1581 - is the oldest striped rose on record, and is a sport of the Apothecary's Rose. Named for "Fair Rosamund," mistress of King Henry II of England. It is a very interesting **once-bloomer**; 3 to 4 feet; useful in rose border in front of taller growing varieties. Very small prickles are another attribute of this and all Gallicas.

R. roxburghii – Chestnut Rose, Burr Rose, Chinquapin Rose

A very unusual distinctive variety, introduced from a Chinese garden to England and America around 1820. Lilac pink flowers that are many petaled **blooms primarily in spring**, with intermittent blooms later in the year. Bark tends to flake on older plants.

R. laevigata – Cherokee Rose

Georgia's state flower is a giant of a rose, climbing 15-20 feet into a tree, or piling onto itself into one huge mound. Dark, green leaves that are totally disease free. **Once blooming** in early spring. Flowers are large white 5-petaled blooms with prominent yellow stamens. Dated 1759.

R. palustris – Swamp Rose (one of my favorites)

Native species rose of Louisiana and Mississippi, and east to Florida, naturally occurring along streams and in marshes. It can tolerate wet, poorly drained locations, but also grows well in the landscape. Stems are almost thornless; **once blooming**, but the foliage is very attractive year round, having a light, weeping appearance that gives it an oriental look. Fragrant. Dated 1726.

OLD GARDEN ROSES

ALBA – Known as “white roses”, the plants are upright, often climbing, have dense blue-green foliage, and are disease resistant. Alba roses are once bloomers, and may not be the best class for the Gulf Coast, but are thought to perform fairly well further north.

‘Great Maiden’s Blush’ is a great example from this group, cultivated prior to 1738. ‘Felicite Parmentier’ and ‘Mme Plantier’ – are newer - 1867 and 1835.

AYRSHIRE – A group of climbing sprawling roses that originated in Scotland. **Once blooming.**

BOURBON – First repeat-flowering roses developed from a natural cross between a China variety ‘Old Blush’ and ‘Autumn Damask,’ both planted as hedges on the French island called Ile de Bourbon. The first cultivar was painted by Empress Josephine Bonaparte’s painter Pierre Redoute in 1817. Plant size of varieties in this class range from 2 to 15 feet tall. **Repeat blooming.** Bourbons are among the roses that perform best in the heat of the south. My favorite rose is in this group – it performs in the heat of the summer better than all the modern roses in my garden.

‘Souvenir de la Malmaison’ - this is it! Malmaison was Empress Josephine’s country estate outside Paris. The variety produces large, quartered blooms with heavy petals in a luscious shade of light pink. Fragrance is strong, and the bush is mannerly at 3-4 feet. Thomas Affleck, the rose nurseryman who operated in Natchez for a time, said of the rose, “How I envy the grower who first saw that plant bloom, the seed of which he had sown, feeling that such a gem was his!”

Other great Bourbons are ‘Louise Odier,’ the thornless ‘Zephirine Drouhin,’ ‘Mme. Isaac Pereire;’ and the great “found” rose named ‘Maggie’ is thought to be a Bourbon.

BOURSAULT – A small group of thornless rambling-type roses developed by the French gardener who gave his name to the class. **Once blooming.**

CENTIFOLIA – These Dutch hybridized roses derive their class name from the fact the flowers often contain more than 100 petals. Plants are 4 to 8 feet tall and winter hardy. They are also referred to as “cabbage roses” and are featured in Dutch flower paintings of the 17th century. **Once blooming.**

CHINA – Every Southern garden should have a few China roses. They are virtually disease free, **repeat blooming**, easy to propagate and easy to grow. Growth can be large (over 4 feet), but there are a few very small bushes ranging from 2 to 3 feet tall. Stems are often airy, twiggy and sparse. New growth is red, offering an added garden effect. Most blooms are loosely petaled with a light, spicy fragrance. Plants are not hardy and require winter protection in cold climates, but they are amazingly successful in the south. As I write this in late January, I have found early blooms on at least four China varieties in my garden in central Louisiana.

‘Old Blush’ – dated 1752, is first to bloom in the spring, and last to stop blooming in winter. Easy to grow. Blooms are light pink. Bush is upright, and the variety is also available in the climbing version, which is excellent.

‘Louis Philippe’ is a red China dated 1834. It is found in many cemeteries across the south. Especially effective in plantings of 3-5 bushes, which produce blooms almost year long.

‘Archduke Charles’ dated 1837, is a great example of the rose color “red-blend.” The rose blooms are cupped in shape, with light pink centers and outer petals of deep red.

‘Mutabilis’ – is often called the “Butterfly Rose” because the single (5 petal) blooms can be flutter-y. The most unique thing about this variety is the number of colors of its blooms – opening a soft yellow, they change from salmon to pink and ending in magenta. A very satisfying garden plant, it can grow very large if left unpruned.

'Green Rose' is loved by many and disdained by others. The "flowers" are actually green, turning bronze as they mature. Floral arrangers love this variety.

DAMASK – These roses are best known for their intense heavy fragrance. Plants generally range in size from 3 to 6 feet. **Some varieties are repeat blooming.** Will grow in the south, but bushes last only a few years for me. Like some of the classes that do better in colder climates, I believe this class needs an extended cold dormancy to thrive.

HYBRID BRACTEATA – One important rose to southern rosarians is the variety 'Mermaid'. It is a vigorous bush with dark green, healthy foliage. The blooms are a lovely yellow with very long and prominent stamens. Plant it where it can grow freely, and be careful of the thorns. **Repeat blooms.**

HYBRID EGLANTERIA – I don't know a recommendation for this class, but we must mention a special rose named R. eglanteria, a species rose with small non-descript blooms and a pronounced fragrance of green apples emitting from the foliage. I once grew it near my mailbox, and the apple fragrance always pleased me on my daily walks to get the mail.

HYBRID FOETIDA

HYBRID GALLICA – Plants are small, 3 to 4 feet tall, and are winter hardy. Blooms are fragrant and come in brilliant colors. **Once blooming.**

HYBRID MULTIFLORA – There are three varieties that are interesting in this class. They are **once bloomers** and very vigorous climber-rambler types.

'Veilchenblau' offers semi-double blooms in many shades of lavender through purple through grayish blue, in a long blooming period in the spring. It is virtually thornless and highly fragrant. Very disease resistant. 1909.

'Carnea' is one of the very early rambler roses. Clusters of small, very full pink blooms grow on canes that can reach 15-20 feet. A spectacular show for one long blooming period in the spring. 1804.

'Seven Sisters' is a once blooming rambler with large clusters of blooms in a number of colors at once – hence the name. The blooms can be creamy white, pink, mauve, and bright pink, and produce quite a show on its long 15-20 foot canes. Other varieties are often called 'Seven Sisters', but are not nearly so impressive as the real thing. 1817.

HYBRID PERPETUAL – Popular during the 19th century, these roses are characterized by their **repeat bloom**, plant size (about 6 feet tall, upright), fragrance and color range (mostly pinks and reds). The Hybrid Perpetual class was once the largest group of roses, however, many have been lost through time – maybe because they were not hardy, and others because they were overcome when the Hybrid Tea gained in popularity. There are a few wonderful Hybrid Perpetuals.

'Frau Karl Druschki' – 1901 – is a beautiful white repeat bloomer which is sometimes known as "White American Beauty" and also "Snow Queen".

'Paul Neyron' - 1869 - had the largest blooms I have ever seen. Beautiful rose pink blooms on upright bush with large dark green leaves. This one is a rose show winner.

'Marchesa Boccella' – 1842 – is a light pink very double rose bloom. Very desirable.

HYBRID SEMPERVIRENS

HYBRID SETIGERA

HYBRID SPINOSISSIMA

MISCELLANEOUS OLD GARDEN ROSES – I am not sure why there needs to be a miscellaneous class of roses, but there are two varieties that appear in this class worth mentioning:

‘Fortune’s Double Yellow’ is a rambling type bush with canes of 6-10 feet. It was discovered in China in 1845 by Robert Fortune. Its blooms are yellow and apricot with some pink on the edges of the petals – a very unusual color combination for an Old Garden Rose. The blooms last for several weeks in the spring. **Once blooming.**

‘Fortuniana’ – Also discovered by Robert Fortune, this rose is closely related to the Banksias species roses. Its white blooms are cascading, growing all along the long 8-10 foot canes. It is totally disease free, and very vigorous. When roses are grafted or budded onto this understock, the voracious root system causes the grafted variety to be a very vigorous grower. **Once blooming.** 1850.

MOSS – Named for the mossy thorn growth on the peduncle just below the bloom and sepals, this group releases a pine-scent when the moss is rubbed between the fingers. Plants are generally winter hardy and 3 to 6 feet tall. **Some varieties are repeat blooming.**

NOISETTE – This classification originated in the United States by Philippe Noisette of Charleston, SC, who later introduced them in France when he moved there in 1817. Plants are large and sprawling, often reaching up to 20 feet tall. Blooms are produced in fragrant clusters. **Repeat bloom.** Many are cluster-flowered, and most are very fragrant.

‘Lamarque’ – 1830 – is a vigorous climber with white, very double blooms.

‘Celine Forestier’ – 1858 – a lovely rose of creamy yellow blooms.

‘Champneys’ Pink Cluster’ – 1811 – An American cross between a Musk rose and ‘Old Blush’ was the first in what would become a large group of fragrant roses – the Noisettes.

‘Marechal Niel’ – 1864 – a “legendary” rose during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Grows as a climber with beautiful yellow blooms throughout the growing season.

PORTLAND – A small group of roses that were derived from crosses involving Hybrid Gallica, Damask, Centifolia and China. They are small in stature – usually 4 feet tall, **repeat blooming** and have very short peduncles. Class named in honor of the Duchess of Portland.

TEA – A beautiful collection of roses, some with the bloom form of modern Hybrid Teas, all with large blooms of heavy fragrance, all great performers in the South. Teas are well-mannered plants, characterized as small-to-medium sized, 4 feet tall or taller. Blooms are large. Flower form is symmetrical. Tea roses are the forerunner of modern Hybrid Tea roses. **Repeat bloomer.**

MODERN ROSES

FLORIBUNDA & CLIMBING FLORIBUNDA – Floribundas are bred to bear flowers in large clusters producing massive, colorful, long lasting garden displays, and giving the appearance of a continuous bloom in the garden. They are tremendously popular in garden settings, and are available in a wide range of colors. **Repeat blooms.** You all know many floribunda varieties, but I will name a few of the higher rated ones:

‘Iceberg’ – an important white floribunda. The foliage is dark green and glossy, providing a dramatic background for the clean white blooms. Often used in mass plantings for great effect. 1968 and still a best seller.

‘Sunsprite’ - a very deep yellow that keeps its color as the bloom ages. Fragrant.

‘Europeana’ – spreading bush form with clusters of dark red blooms. 1963.

‘Vera Dalton’ - our representative floribunda in the color pink. The large blooms appear in clusters on a vigorous and upright bush.

‘Angel Face’ – deep lavender bloom with wavy petals that are immensely fragrant.

‘Playboy’ – orange single blooms with a touch of red on the edges and a yellow eye.

GRANDIFLORA & CLIMBING GRANDIFLORA – In 1954, the introduction of a rose bred from crossing the hybrid tea ‘Charlotte Armstrong’ with the floribunda ‘Floradora’ resulted in a variety that displayed not only the characteristics of a hybrid tea but also the ability to bear clusters, and which could attain height of 6 feet or more. The rose, ‘Queen Elizabeth’ had the distinction of being the very first member of this class.

‘Queen Elizabeth’ – An award winning variety. Very tall, healthy bush which bears exquisitely colored medium pink blooms. Still popular after 53 years.

‘Gold Medal’ – A really good dark yellow rose, tall and golden, and the really good news is – it’s thornless.

HYBRID GIGANTEA

HYBRID KORDESII

HYBRID MOYESII

HYBRID MUSK – The Hybrid Musk class contains many wonderful roses with shrub-type characteristics which are excellent in the landscape. Some are bush form, others are climbers and grow well as pillars. The colors are soft, and most are fragrant. These roses will tolerate more shade than most other classes. Most produce nice hips. Some of the Hybrid Musks I have grown and am growing are listed here:

‘Trier’ – a large rambling variety which grows 5-7 feet. One of the first Musks dated 1904. The blooms are white, tiny and are displayed in large clusters.

‘Felicia’ – Intensely fragrant pink rose with dark green foliage.

‘Penelope’ – Said to be the most popular of the class, Penelope grows up to 5 feet high and equally wide, with good foliage. The blooms are salmon-pink with beautiful centers.

‘Belinda’ – Incredible sprays of pink blooms. In spring, the spray can be as large as 8 x 12 inches.

‘Ballerina’ – Small single flowers on a dense bush. Produces small and plentiful hips.

HYBRID RUGOSA – The varieties in this class won’t tolerate chemical sprays, and that’s a good thing because the foliage is rough, dark green, and healthy. I have found that Rugosas only last several years in our southern gardens, and I believe the heat is not to their liking.

HYBRID TEA & CLIMBING HYBRID TEA – The most popular class of modern roses is the hybrid tea. They bear shapely blooms that we describe as “classic” form. Long straight stems are characteristic; fragrance is not always present. The first Hybrid Tea was ‘La France’ created in 1867. That variety signaled the advent of the “modern” rose, and all classes created after that date are classified as “Modern Classes;” all classes created before that date are classified as “Old Garden Roses.”

‘Touch of Class’ – orange pink

‘Mister Lincoln’ – dark red

‘First Prize’ – pink blend

‘Double Delight’ – red blend

‘Dainty Bess’ – light pink, a single

‘Gemini’ – pink blend, winner of American Rose Society “Members’ Choice Award”

HYBRID WICHURANA – Mostly modern ramblers and ground cover varieties.

LARGE FLOWERED CLIMBER – Another class that is created to group roses with a climbing growth habit.

‘New Dawn’ – light pink climber with the distinction of holding the first plant patent.

- 'Altissimo' – a vibrant red single rose with prominent yellow stamens.
- 'Don Juan' – red, very large, full blooms
- 'Autumn Sunset' – golden yellow-orange classed as apricot blend; great foliage

MINIATURE & CLIMBING MINIATURE – Novel and versatile; because of their size they can be used in a variety of ways – in pots and on patios, in rock gardens, as edging, or interspersed among other roses and plants in the landscape. Miniature roses have enjoyed an explosion of popularity in recent years. The bush size can vary from 12 inches to several feet.

We should note that the man known as the “Father of Miniature Roses,” Ralph Moore of Visalia, CA is still hybridizing roses and in January, he celebrated his 100th birthday.

- 'Rise 'n' Shine' – yellow
- 'Magic Carrousel' – red blend
- 'Rainbow's End' – yellow blend
- 'My Sunshine' – yellow single
- 'Fairhope' – white – winningest miniature rose, hybridized by an Alabama rosarian.
- 'Red Cascade' – red climbing miniature

MINI-FLORA – Mini-Flora roses are a new classification adopted in 1999 to recognize another step in the evolution of the rose – intermediate bloom size and foliage which falls between miniatures and floribundas. They are not as readily available yet, but the popularity of this class is growing rapidly.

POLYANTHA & CLIMBING POLYANTHA – Polyanthas include varieties that every rosarian and gardener can love. They often have the charm of old garden roses, and the growth habit of modern roses.

- 'Mrs. R. M. Finch' – medium pink clusters of 7-10 blooms; glossy, healthy foliage.
- 'The Fairy' – This rose has been around since 1932, and is still very popular. The leaves are glossy, the growth is low with lots of branches, and sticky prickles.
- 'Perle d'Or' – one of my favorites, this polyantha has yellow blend blooms with very unusual form. The rose was hybridized in 1884.
- 'Mlle Cecile Brunner' grows as a bush and as a climber. Known as the “Sweetheart Rose”, it is a great grower with perfect, tiny buds and small light pink blooms.
- 'China Doll' is a pretty pink rose, but I love it for its weepy, oriental-like foliage. It is disease resistant, with continual bloom.

SHRUB – Shrub is a catch-all class for many subdivisions, and this grouping confuses even the most knowledgeable among us. There are “Classic” shrubs and there are “Modern” shrubs. “Classic” shrubs include the classes hybrid kordesii, hybrid moyesii, hybrid musk and hybrid rugosa. “Modern” shrubs include those that are “left over” – my terminology, plus the modern shrubs include the ever-so-popular varieties created by David Austin, the “English Roses.” Also included are the magnificent roses created by the late Dr. Griffith Buck, bred to be hardy and disease resistant. The latter are found among the collection of “Earth Kind” roses which have been proven to be “no-care” roses.

In addition to the beautiful collection of English Roses that Austin is creating, many other hybridizers are developing landscape-type roses with characteristics that we want – ease of growing, disease resistance, low border plants, medium sized and manageable plants, that provide color in the garden, and that will grow in harmony with foundation plants, shrub borders, perennials, bulbs and bedding plants.

In my opinion, the emergence of these new shrub roses is the most exciting news in the rose world today. More and more people are opening their gardens to roses, and enjoying the romance, fragrance and pleasure of growing roses because of these new varieties. My list in this class would be endless, but I would like to mention just one rose that has probably revolutionized the industry and the hobby of growing roses more than any rose in a very long time. That rose is:

'Knock Out'

It was created by an amateur hybridizer, William Radler, in 1999. Since then, it has swept the country, winning awards along the way, including the ARS Members' Choice Award. It is being planted by landscapers when they typically avoid planting roses for their clients. It is being used in public rose gardens, and in public parks and around public and commercial buildings. It is the variety that is sold out at nurseries first. The bush can grow quite large, but can be pruned to the gardener's specifications. It is disease free, and the foliage is beautiful year-round. It can make a nice border plant, and is lovely grown as a specimen. Blooms of 'Knock Out' are cherry red, but now there are sports in other colors: 'Pink Knock Out,' 'Blushing Knock Out,' 'Rainbow Knock Out' and no doubt there will be more.

I hope that you will gain an understanding and appreciation of the wonderful family of roses as you review this material from time to time. I also hope you will try some of the roses in the classes that are highlighted – they are the roses which grow best for our climate and conditions, and they are the roses that have grown best for me in my own home garden.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marilyn Wellan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.