

# ALL ABOUT ROSES

## Exhibiting Roses

### Let's Go To a Rose Show - Exhibiting Old Garden Roses by [Jeri Jennings](#)



You may not intend to make exhibiting a big part of your love of roses. Even so, if you're going to do it at all, you might as well do it WELL. It's REALLY not Rocket Science.

The mechanics of showing Old Roses varies not one whit from the mechanics of showing Modern ones. If, therefore, you already know all there is to know about showing Modern roses - stop reading - NOW!

If, on the other hand, you don't know it all, stick with me for a few basics.

#### **FIRST, READ THE RULES: (THE SHOW SCHEDULE)**

The Show Schedule lays out the 'Rules Of The Road' for each rose show. The rules may differ widely from one show to another, and the classes and their numbers ALWAYS vary. Read the whole thing before you even start picking roses, so you know what to pick. You'll almost always see a class for 'Old Garden Roses Introduced Before 1867' (that's the competition for Dowager Queen) and 'Old Garden Roses Introduced In 1867 Or Later' (that's competition for the ARS Victorian Rose Award). Both of these are 'Certificate Classes.' In other words, almost every club offers an ARS Certificate to the winners of these classes. Most people who've exhibited roses for a while come to look beyond the trophy, and place more personal value on the ARS Certificates.

Look through all of the 'Challenge Classes.' You may find classes open to 'any large rose.' These might include Floating Bowl, English Box, Artists Palette, Picture Frame, Most Fragrant, and so forth. If they say 'any large rose,' your Old Roses are eligible for the class. You may not WIN, mind - but these classes offer another place for us to sneak Old Roses onto the tables so people can see them.

Are your roses eligible to be shown? To be eligible, roses must be of NAMED VARIETIES, and they must be in commerce, or have been in commerce within fairly recent times. A listing in Modern Roses XI, The Combined Rose List, The Handbook For Selecting Roses, and/or ARS's Official List of Exhibition Names will suffice to give the rose official status. I confess without shame that I have, on occasion, entered found roses - clearly ineligible - in rose shows. Their inevitable disqualification was unimportant. It was enough - for me anyhow - that they were on the table for people to see and enjoy.

#### **SELECTING AND PICKING BLOOMS**

Modern Roses are often cut several days before a rose show, and refrigerated until show day. Some Old Roses tolerate this procedure just as well as moderns. Experiment to find out which of your roses tolerate it. Petals will dry and burn in a frost-free refrigerator, but a thin, light plastic bag, placed over the bloom, and secured at the stem with a twist-tie, can usually prevent or minimize this damage.

For a Saturday morning show, we don't usually pick roses until Thursday afternoon at the earliest. By Friday morning, I'm in 'Picking Mode.' I start early, checking every couple of hours, to catch roses just starting to open, right up 'til dusk.

Practice DOES make perfect. Pick your roses often, for the house. Observe their vase life, and the opening process

of the bloom. You'll learn when blooms should be picked, in order to assure they're at their best stage at mid-morning on rose show day, when the judges see them. Remember: **FRESHNESS COUNTS**.

**FRESHNESS:** Where stamens are visible, they **MUST** be fresh. Bright golden (or red) stamens add immeasurably to an open bloom. Black, dried stamens are the 'Kiss Of Death'.

**Cut Long Stems.** The length of a perfectly-proportioned Hybrid Tea Rose stem is approximately 5 times the depth (top to bottom) of the bloom. Long stems aren't the general rule among Old Roses, but you should pick the longest stem you **CAN**. Many Old Roses characteristically bloom on very short laterals in a generous row, all along a cane. This makes them tough to exhibit - but such a cane-full might provide enough matched blooms to make up a spectacular English Box - with, perhaps one left over to float in a bowl. And some shows have a 'Trailing Rose' class just for these types.

### **CONDITIONING**

Cut blooms a few at a time. Don't let the thorns of one rose shred the petals or foliage of another. As you cut each bloom, **RE-CUT** the stem under water. **DO NOT OMIT THIS STEP**. If you do, the bloom may be unable to access water, and will quickly wilt. Dead roses show poorly.

To condition freshly cut blooms, plunge the stem and foliage into a basin of warm water. Allow them to repose there as the water cools. A small amount of vegetable wash added to this water bath will help to loosen dust, dirt, and spray materials. The foliage will come out of the bath quite clean, and your final grooming task will be made easier. Stand the blooms in a container of fresh, cool water, and put them in a dark, cool place. You may choose to add a floral conditioner at this time.

### **IDENTITY CRISIS**

It's a wise mother who knows her own child, and a wise rosarian who knows his or her own roses. You may not be all that wise in a dark parking lot, at 6 a.m. A tag or label tied loosely to the stem of each bloom will save you from accidentally entering 'Irene Watts' as 'Clementina Carbonieri.'

### **CONTAINERS AND TRANSPORT**

We use 1.5-Liter plastic water bottles, with the tops cut off. They can be cut to any length, to accommodate even short-stemmed blooms. Each bottle is placed inside a cut-down half-gallon milk carton. Nine cartons fit into a plastic milk crate. This combination is easy to handle, and stable in your car.

### **FINAL PREPARATIONS**

When darkness drives you from the garden, sit down and fill out your ARS entry tags. Be sure your name and address are on each tag (use some of those inexpensive return-address labels).

When entering Old Roses at an American Rose Society rose show, write the **CLASS**, and the **Date Of Introduction** of each rose on the ARS entry tag. Check Modern Roses XI, the current Handbook For Selecting Roses, the current ARS Official List of Exhibition Names, and/or the Combined Rose List to be sure the names, dates, and classes are correct.

Check an area map. Be sure you know where the show is located, how to get there, and how long the drive will take.

You'll leave for the rose show **VERY** early on Saturday morning. Your final Friday night task might be to take your roses out to your garage - even place them in the car. It's probably darker and cooler there than in your house, and you'll have one less thing to do in the morning.

### **SATURDAY MORNING - THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE WORM - AND THE VASES**

If you're a novice exhibitor, don't hesitate to ask a more-experienced friend for advice. **BUT ASK EARLY!** Do **NOT** wait 'til the last few frantic minutes before entries close to seek advice. You may not get it, until it's too late. Get there **EARLY**.

Experienced exhibitors arrive at the rose show site around 5:30 a.m. Their first action upon arrival will be to collect vases from the show properties area. If you arrive late at a show with a big entry, there may be no vases left. Get there **EARLY**. Know about how many vases you'll need. **GET THEM**, and bring them to your work area.

At some rose show locations, a 'prep' room may be set aside, furnished with tables. In most cases, this is impossible, and the dark parking lot becomes an outdoor 'prep' area. Bring a small table and a chair, and a battery-powered lamp. It's tough to groom roses on the ground, in the dark.

Got your vases? OK! Snag a cuppa coffee and a donut from the hospitality table, and let's get to work.

## **PRESENTATION**

"Roses cut by novices for the home and office usually have short, scraggly stems and dirty tattered foliage. A good exhibition rose is shown on a long, straight stem with clean, intact foliage . . ." [Bob Martin, How Roses Are Judged: A Primer For The Novice Exhibitor]

## **CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS**

Your foliage got a bit of a wash yesterday when you cut and prepared your roses, so cleaning is going to be pretty easy. You're just going to polish the leaves a little. Some rosarians use an old nylon stocking for this task. We use very thin old cotton dishtowels - the 'floursacking' kind. Polish each leaf carefully, wiping away any remaining dirt. You can't use any 'foreign substance' to tart up the leaves, but the natural oils in your skin will impart a bit of a shine as you rub away the last of the dirt.

You shouldn't have much mildew - because the roses you're growing are pretty 'clean' - but do check around the peduncle - a typical place for some 'stealth mildew.' It's easily wiped off. Damage around the edge or the outer end of a leaf is distracting. Carefully trim away damaged areas, trying to retain the correct shape of the leaf. Deckle-edged scissors (available at any craft store) can restore the normal zig-zag edge of the leaf. This is quite legal. (You may REMOVE distractions. You cannot ADD 'camouflage'.)

Look at the BACK of the bloom. The outer row of 'guard' petals is often damaged or discolored. Remove these - rocking them carefully loose, and being careful not to leave part of the petal behind.

## **UNWANTED GROWTH**

Are there side growths? You'll find them where a leaf set joins the stem. Remove the pesky things, and avoid a 'heavy penalty.' A sharp X-acto knife is a good tool for this - but BE CAREFUL! DON'T CUT OFF THE LEAF SET! First, try gently popping the unwanted growth off with your fingernail.

## **SIDE-BUDS - 'DECISION TIME'**

Unlike most Modern Roses, Old Roses and Shrub Roses may be shown with side-buds. 'May,' however, doesn't always mean 'should.'

Some Old Roses - such as the Mosses - probably won't win WITHOUT a side-bud or two, to demonstrate their unique nature. Look at the bloom under your hand. Ask yourself whether it is enhanced by its side-buds, or whether they are a distraction. One or two artfully-placed side-buds may act as 'beauty marks.' SIX side-buds is probably too much. Remove any side-buds that detract from the beauty, or the balance, of the rose.

## **BALANCE AND PROPORTION**

The Exhibition Hybrid Tea stem should ideally be 5-times as long as the bloom is deep.

Many Old Roses simply will not grow that much stem, but you still want to aim for a graceful and balanced proportion of stem-to-bloom. You'll learn with practice to 'know it when you see it,' largely because it will look good to you. Make a practice of cutting blooms with long stems. Practice at home before show day, with different roses, and you'll begin to see how much stem length (between the lip of the vase and the bloom head) is flattering, how much is too little, or too much.

## **'DOG LEGS'**

When you cut a rose, just above an outward-facing bud eye, new growth will start from that bud eye, growing at a slight angle to the old cane, and stretching out to become a new cane, topped by a bloom or blooms. That transition from new cane to older cane actually does resemble the angle of a dog's rear leg, from stifle to hock, and so it is called a 'dog leg.' Another term for this is 'stem-on-stem.' The foliage on the older, lower part of the 'dog leg' is

usually older and more worn. Sometimes there's no foliage there at all.

Modern Roses (other than Shrub Roses) cannot be shown 'stem-on-stem.' Many Old Roses (and some Shrubs) grow on shorter stems, so to put these roses in a vase at all, you may have to cut a 'dog leg.' Recognizing this, ARS allows 'stem-on-stem' in classes for these roses.

SO - you MAY show Old Roses with a 'dog leg.' BUT SHOULD YOU?

The answer is: SOMETIMES. Faced with a bloom that is short-stemmed, with a noticeable dog-leg, try staging it at various levels. Perhaps the dog-leg can be placed just below the rim of the vase? Avoid presenting the judges with a noticeable expanse of bare cane, or old, worn foliage. Such 'distractions' may prove fatal to your chances of earning a blue ribbon.

Finally, while 'Stem-On-Stem' is legal, 'Stem-On-Stem-On-Stem' is NEVER legal.

### **TO WEDGE, OR NOT TO WEDGE, THAT IS THE QUESTION**

Check your show schedule. Do the rules permit the use of WEDGING material? Most do - so FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, USE IT!! 'Wedging' may be any of several sorts of material used to hold your rose firmly upright in the vase - and your rose will look infinitely better standing up straight. Wedging can also help you make the most of a short stem. Our favorite wedging material is a green floral foam, sold by the brick for use in dry arrangements. It's easy to cut, and easy to use.

Various other materials have been used as Wedging. Avoid plastic wrap! It floats up when wet, and expands until it's above the lip of the vase, often allowing the rose to flop over unattractively. It also prevents refilling of vases, which annoys Show Committees. Crumpled aluminum foil is good wedging, but it detracts from the appearance of your rose. Judges aren't supposed to look below the rim of the vase, but - hey! They're only human! Newspaper is sometimes used (it's awful to work with) and a few shows have specified 'natural plant material.' What a mess THAT is!

Be sure no wedging material protrudes above the lip of the vase. It's unattractive, and it will get your entry disqualified, and that's a dumb reason to lose.

### **LEAVE THE LEAVES!**

Complete removal of foliage is one of the most common beginner errors

If you have a beautiful bloom with badly-damaged foliage, you're unlikely to win Dowager Queen or Victorian, but you DEFINITELY won't win if your stem has NO foliage. So FORGET the Dowager and Victorian competition, and go for alternate classes. Are English Box or Floating Bloom classes offered for Old Garden Roses? Is there a class for an Old Garden Rose Bouquet? This sort of informal bouquet should show some foliage, just as Grandma's bouquets did. But there's usually room in the center to hide an ugly stem attached to a perfect bloom. Any of these 'different' classes might be better bets for success.

### **AVOID DISQUALIFICATION!**

"When a rose is "disqualified" it is removed from consideration altogether. By contrast a rose that is 'penalized' for various faults simply loses points and can still be a winner. It is therefore fundamental that you must avoid disqualification.

'Lest you head immediately for the exit be assured that disqualification rarely occurs (particularly in a novice class) and can be avoided with simply a little care. On the other hand it remains a real possibility should you get sloppy, much as an error in baseball. I have had entries disqualified on several occasions, almost always through carelessness or oversight. I have also seen entries from the very best exhibitors disqualified. It is embarrassing, but less so for the novice, and it can be avoided." [Bob Martin, How Roses Are Judged: A Primer For The Novice Exhibitor]

Even if a rose is disqualified, it will remain on the show table, where it can be seen - but we would all prefer to see really correct Old Roses win the trophies. The bad thing about disqualification is that it NEVER seems to happen to rather mundane entries. Ooooooohh, Noooooooooooo. Let us, therefore, avoid the pitfalls that might lead your rose to be disqualified.

## **ROSES MIGHT BE DISQUALIFIED FROM COMPETITION FOR VARIOUS REASONS. AMONG THESE ARE:**

**Misnamed.** Rules require that you write the correct name of your rose on the ARS Entry Tag - but do you KNOW the correct name of your rose? Oh, you know what the grower tag says, but IS THE TAG CORRECT? We've had in our garden at one time or another a dozen or more roses that turned out not to be what we thought they were - or what their sellers apparently thought they were, when they shipped them. This sort of error is particularly common with very small, newly-rooted, own-root plants, but anything sold while not in bloom is suspect.

Even if you have the correct name, be sure you have the correct SPELLING. (Yes, you CAN be disqualified for misspelling the name.) The ARS handbook, Handbook for Selecting Roses provides correct spelling. A list of approved exhibition names is published annually by ARS, and sells for \$10. Other good references are the current copy of Modern Roses XI, and/or the Combined Rose List.

Is 'La Reine Victoria' correct? Or is that lovely Bourbon called 'Reine Victoria'? Look it up. Make sure you've got it right.

**Misclassified.** You must write the correct section and class on your entry tag. This information is in the show schedule, but if in doubt, ask a more experienced exhibitor to interpret. If you're showing Old Garden Roses, you need to make sure that your rose really IS an Old Garden Rose. The fact that it might have been sold as 'old fashioned' doesn't mean it's an OGR. Modern Roses XI includes this information, along with the date of introduction, (before? or after? 1867) which determines whether you should enter Dowager or Victorian competition.

**Unlabeled/Mislabeled.** An Entry Tag must be attached to your rose. You must have written your name and address on it as indicated. Most shows don't require that you fill out the entire tag - but check your Show Schedule for local rules. An Entry Number is rarely required in our area, but if it IS required, and you don't include it - you're DQ'd. Use black or blue ink that won't run, and is easy to read. Many exhibitors use mailing labels or a rubber stamp for name and address - a time-saver on show day.

MISLABELLED would also include failure to write the CLASS and DATE of INTRODUCTION on the entry tag. (For example: Cl. Tea, 1850) Here, things get dicey. ARS has changed the classes, and even dates of introduction, of several Old Roses - principally among those WE still regard as Chinas. Modern Roses XI does not reflect these changes. The 2003 Handbook, while it doesn't include all Old Roses, is at least up-to-date. When in doubt - ask someone else. If you don't get an answer, go straight to the show chairperson for clarification.

The embarrassing error of failing to put your name and address on the entry tag comes under this heading. Yes, we have lost that way, (the rose we failed to label WOULD have been awarded Dowager Queen) and we know others who have done the same. It's a mistake you make only once. Nowadays, my husband and I check each other's work carefully on show mornings, and if you're showing as a team, that's a great thing to do. If you're a solo act, check your own work carefully.

**Foreign Substance.** Forget about using oil, green ink, or the like to improve the appearance of your foliage. Don't even THINK about resorting to pins or wires! These things are all classed as 'foreign substances,' and will be grounds for disqualification. Likewise, your entry can be DQ'd if you've left cotton balls, Q-Tips or the like sticking in the bloom to open it up.

## **TOOLS OF THE TRADE:**

A basic 'kit' of tools for showing roses can be assembled with a look around the house. You should have a very small, sharp pair of scissors. Cuticle scissors are terrific. A small cheap paintbrush for brushing 'crud' away from a delicate bloom. An Ex-Acto knife is really an important tool - preferably with a sharp new blade. A box of Q-tips may come in handy - so might a few cotton balls. Address labels or a name and address stamp, for entry tags. One block of wedging material can be obtained very cheaply at Michaels - and so can a pair of deckle-edged scissors - if you're feeling expansive.

Books that go to rose shows with us: the ARS Handbook For Selecting Roses, the Combined Rose List, and Modern Roses XI. A paperback booklet of Approved Exhibition Names is a yearly publication - the 2003 edition will include standards for judging roses - a handy thing to have.

More important than all of the errors of omission and commission, there's one overwhelming mistake that will prevent you from winning trophies at rose shows:

**IF YOUR ROSES AREN'T ENTERED, YOU CAN'T WIN**

This, of course, applies to Modern, as well as Old Roses. The roses you didn't pick and take to the show because they 'weren't good enough' may have been just what people coming to the show were hoping to see. And they just might have won. We've lost with roses we thought were sure winners. We've won with roses we threw in at the last minute as 'color for the table.' You never know. That's part of the fun.

When this year's rose show season begins, PLEASE give the show thing a try. Join us in that dark parking lot. Let's gather together, and have a good time. We can enter our roses, and then enjoy the day, and the rose show, together.

Let's fill the show tables with the REAL Queens of The Garden!