

Roses Worth Growing

Rob Cole

Roses are supposed to be the nation's favourite flower, but I have often declared that although the flower is often sublimely beautiful, the bush on which it grows is equally often an inelegant, twiggy and disease ridden mess. My apologies are due now to all the rose lovers, but as a garden plant, I think the rose bush can be quite unattractive. Breeders have constantly strived to produce better flowers, in an ever wider range of colours and forms, but have only just recognised that they should also begin to concentrate on producing a neat and attractive plant on which they are displayed.

But, having said all that, we do grow some roses here at Meadow Farm. We find the climbers very useful to give colourful height on pillars and pergolas and among those we grow are 'Dublin Bay', 'Altissimo', 'Constance Spry' and 'Open Arms'. My favourite is perhaps 'Narrow Water' (classified as a rambler but quite genteel) which has clusters of soft lilac-pink semi double flowers. 'Super Excelsa' is another mild mannered rambler and completely smothers itself in clusters of red-pink double flowers. Both are repeat flowering.

Of the smaller growing 'ground cover' roses, 'Centre Stage' has been just wonderful. Bought from Ashwood Nurseries in August 2002, it has covered itself every year in soft pink flowers from June to November and has rarely needed pruning to keep it in shape or under control. Its habit is tight and compact, it never looks as if it has gone over (many roses hang on to their dying flowers) and it has never shown any signs of disease or mildew.

We only grow a few Floribunda roses, but 'Hanky Panky' is always an eye-catcher with its orange-red double blooms splashed with white and cream. 'Rhapsody in Blue' is a repeat flowering shrub rose, but as there is no real blue rose yet, it should properly be called 'Rhapsody in Mauve', but I do like it. We have another 'blue' rose called 'Blue for You', this time a Floribunda type, which is claimed to be the best 'blue' to date - it opens a purple mauve and fades to a slate blue but doesn't 'go over' very well unfortunately, so deadheading is a must.

Having decried the rose as being an inelegant garden plant, I have checked my database and find that we actually grow over sixty different roses in our garden - so I admit that they can't all be bad!