

Landscaping With Roses

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Rose landscaping in India is, disconcertingly, moored to the past. In the days gone by it was no doubt feasible to have very large exclusive rose gardens, attended to by myriad gardeners. Such gracious times are long over, and we have to think anew. A garden exclusively of roses suffers from several disadvantages, the most obvious being the fact that roses bloom only at intervals, even in the best of seasons, and there are accordingly large parts of the year in which there is nothing to attract the eye. Even worse is the visual impact of roses planted geometrically, one of each variety, prominently labeled – the style favoured by public gardens. Such layouts, far from emphasizing the beauty of the rose, tend to put off the modern gardener who is interested in a garden which looks beautiful during all seasons, and not merely during intervals when the roses are in bloom.

How to achieve a rose garden which looks beautiful even when the roses are not in bloom? If we approach the subject with an open mind it is quite obvious that the answer lies in a judicious mixture of roses with other plants, which will set off the roses and also help to tide over the 'flower-less' periods with their own displays of flowers and foliage.

This apart, while planting roses in a landscape, we should avoid restricting ourselves to one dimension only, i.e., planting only bush roses without variations of height so necessary to catch the eye. An attractive rose garden requires emphasis on the vertical dimension. Apart from bush roses we require roses as standards, and roses as pillars, apart from roses as climbers. Some of the great rosarians of the past were quite aware of these concepts which, when aesthetically employed create garden pictures of lasting impact. I still remember, after 50 years, the exquisite effect of a line of the white

Tea rose, 'Molly Sharman Crawford' budded as standards, set off admirably by blue pansies at ground level, in Dr B.P. Pal's garden in New Delhi.

Similarly, climbing roses so neglected in our gardens can produce spectacular effects even without elaborate structures. Climbers like 'Maréchal Niel' over the simplest rustic supports make an eye-catching display with their hundreds of blooms, as was demonstrated by Mr. Mushti Laxminarayana, Hyderabad's great gardener, in the 1970's.

Again, pillar roses, for example, varieties like 'Prosperity', or the Hybrid Perpetual 'Frau Karl Druschki' make a pleasing contrast to reds of bush roses. Of course, nothing can really beat the visual impact of rose pergolas. But these require elaborate structures, beyond the average gardener.

In the craze for growing Hybrid Teas, the charms of simpler roses which flower much more profusely are quite often overlooked. Varieties like 'Summer Snow', white, 'Echo' and 'Ahalya' in pale pink, and 'Chatillon Rose' and 'Lutin' in dark pink are most effective when planted in groups of several plants. If one favors the yellow shades, shorter Floribundas like 'Bright Smile' can make quite an impact. There used to be a beautiful group of these in the Nagpur Engineering College.

Some of the slightly taller polyantha type roses such as Chiplunkar's vermillion 'Akash Deep' and the almost coral red 'Sanjith' from Kasturirangan could also be utilized effectively, not to speak of more exotic colors like the violet 'International Herald Tribune'.

Many of the old China roses, for example, 'Archduke Charles' which starts pale pink and finishes almost red, or that rose of Chinese silk paintings, 'Old Blush' also form effective garden plants.

Combinations of roses with other plants with contrasting leaf color and flower form can also be most effective. In my Hosur garden, 'Old Blush' growing through a red leaved acalypha, forms an attractive picture as does the cream 'Etoile de Lyon', side by side with yellow lantana.

Some of the taller growing roses, e.g. the white 'Alliance' and the saffron orange 'Lover's Meeting' can be used to good effect with tall pastel colored hibiscus of the type of the 'La France' hybrids, white and pink.

There are numerous choices to make the edges of rose beds more attractive. Plants easily grown, for example, zephyranthes, in pink and yellow, and the ordinary amaryllis (not the huge Dutch ones) especially those in the greenish white and pale pink range can be thought of, as also perennial verbena in shades of lilac, purple and pink, or gazanias and gerberas. Many of the purple leaved shrubs also make an effective contrast plants to roses.

To add another dimension we could think of the shorter trees such as plumerias, which contrast dramatically with roses. All in all, there are no limits to originality in designing rose gardens. So mix the roses with lots of other plants but be careful to keep the aggressive growers at a safe distance from the roses.

May I conclude by saying that even if your rose garden consists only of roses in pots, a much better visual impact can be achieved if the pots are of various sizes and shapes, and some are raised on pedestals, whereas others hug the ground.