

Book Review: *Roses in the Fire of Spring*

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Viru and Girija Viraraghavan bring Viru's scientific background, love of gardening and vision for radically new roses together with Girija's humanities education, love of history and gregarious nature. They were first invited to speak outside of India about Viru's work to

hybridize roses that would thrive in warm, even tropical, climates at the 2000 World Federation of Rose Societies' conference in Houston. Since then, the Viraraghavans have traveled the world, attending (and speaking at) many other rose events, visiting rose gardens and rosarians, trekking to remote areas to look for roses to introduce into their breeding lines, accepting awards, and making friends everywhere. They took advantage of the Covid-19 lockdown to write about their roses, travels, and friends. The result, *Roses in the Fire of Spring: Better Roses for a Warming Climate*, is a beautiful, inspiring book.

Even if you rarely leave home, reading about their travels will allow you to imagine circling the globe with them, sharing in their delight. If you've had the opportunity to travel to some of the same events and locations, you can relive your experience through their detailed description of the people and places. In fact, you might even find your own name in the index of this beautiful book.

Rose books are supposed to be beautiful, and this book does not disappoint. The cover portrays Viru's striking rose 'E. K. Janaki Ammal', named for an Indian botanist and painted by botanical illustrator Hemlata Pradhan. The text is well-organized and there are many photographs. The book's design makes it a pleasure to peruse, with drawings of rose flowers and leaves on the margins of many pages. There is even a yellow ribbon to mark your place.

What does new rose breeding have to do with members of the Heritage Rose Foundation, devoted to the cause of preserving heritage roses? Rose preservation and exploration are key to their work. Viru's breeding program

was founded by observing rose varieties that do well in a warm climate, many of which are old, known European cultivars in China, Noisette and Tea classes such as 'Reve d'Or.' Other roses that thrive in humid heat are widely grown in the tropics but are known only by local common names. Still other promising varieties have been found in isolated locations. Viru has also developed breeding lines using two species that are well-adapted to warmer climates, *R. clinophylla* and *R. gigantea*. The book's last chapter offers intriguing ideas about where promising roses might still be found and what genetics might contribute to warm-climate roses in the future, with the hopes that others will follow in their path (or create new paths altogether).

Viru has introduced over 100 varieties of roses. While the names are trademarked, the roses are not patented. They range from more conventional Hybrid Tea roses to extravagantly beautiful enormous Hybrid Giganteas. In the U.S., Roses Unlimited, Rose Petals, and Angel Gardens offer a selection of Viru's roses, but many are not yet available.

The book also describes the efforts of several early plant explorers and botanists, and how they built the foundation for all garden roses, both heritage and modern.

Interested purchasers can contact Girija via Facebook Messenger or at veerugij9517@gmail.com. Her Facebook page also has many appreciative comments about the book and links to reviews. 🌹



Anita Clevenger, Viru Viraraghavan, Girija Viraraghavan, and Stephen Scanniello at the 2014 HRF Mottisfont