

CLIMBING ROSES

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No rose garden can really be considered complete unless there are a few climbing roses – even the smallest can have one or two, grown at least in pots. But unlike the gardens in the West, or in the garden of Indian hill stations, we generally find that Indian rose growers seem reluctant to grow climbing roses. There are various reasons for this, but the chief one is perhaps due to lack of information on the way to grow these roses and how to obtain optimum results, especially the different method of planting of this types of roses, as compared to the standard bush roses.

To add to the difficulties of the average rosarian is the fact that many different types of roses are lumped together under the heading 'Climbing Roses', without any indication of the methods of cultivation required for each kind.

The basic division of climbing roses can be made into two classes, the once flowering kind, and the perpetually flowering ones.

Among the once flowering kinds are the species roses (wild roses), and the rambler roses, which are the glory of our hill stations. In fact, the latter class, the rambler, is often the cause of disenchantment of the rose grower with climbers as they generally do not perform well on the plains. To elucidate further, these once flowering roses, unlike most modern roses flower on the previous year's growth so if a rambler or a species rose is pruned in the usual manner, i.e. cutting down the old wood, there will be few, if any flowers. Also, these roses require a cold winter in order to induce dormancy and thereafter in the warmth of spring, when the temperature rises, they will burst into profuse bloom. On the plains generally the winter is not cold enough to induce dormancy and, to make matters worse, Spring late Feb.- March, is often too hot, so the display of rambler roses on the plains, even if it occurs at all, is too short lived to be of much garden value.

On the other hand, the continuous flowering climbing roses will grow and perform quite well on the plains, but here again there are some differences in the method of growing them. Such climbers can be grouped into the following different types:

1. Climbing varieties of the Tea roses, e.g. MARECHAL NIEL.
2. Hybrid Musk roses, e.g. PROSPERITY.

3. Climbing sports or mutations of bush roses. These could be mutations of Hybrid Teas, Floribundas, or Miniatures, e.g. CLIMBING PEACE.

4. Modern perpetual flowering climbing roses, e.g. GOLDEN SHOWERS.

Without going into too much detail on the method of growing these roses, two important points need to be mentioned.

a. Climbing roses, as they grow much bigger than others require a much better and more thorough preparation of the soil, so a fairly large pit, any 3' x 3' x 3' (or a larger than usual pot) would be required, filled with rich soil. If the rose has to be trained on a wall, it is advisable to keep the pit a little away from the wall as the area immediately next to the wall is likely to be too dry to give good results and also apt (particularly in new houses) to be full of debris left over from building construction.

b. Rather than pruning, the best results with climbing roses are obtained by proper training of the plants which depends on the support on which the climbing rose is grown-if it is grown on a wall, trellis or fence all that is necessary is to periodically bend over the strong young shoots to cover the wall or trellis in as horizontal inclination as feasible. This ensures that almost every 'eye' will put forth a shoot bearing a flower.

The other method of growing a climbing rose is what is called the 'pillar' method. In this the plant is kept next to a stout wooden or G. I. pipe support (pillar) about 6-8 feet over the ground, and 2 feet underground, depending on the vigor of the variety. From the beginning the shoot of the climber should be trained in such a way so as to spiral around the pillar rather than being tied straight on to it.

Training apart, the actual pruning of these roses consists mainly of shortening the stems which have flowered the previous year to some extent while cutting out only such of the branches which are very old or diseased. Each of the spurs which have borne flowers could also be trimmed at the time of pruning.

Some of the climbing roses that I have grown over the years are listed below following the broad classification into the types already given.

1. **Species roses** :The two species roses which can be known on the plains are *Rosa laevigata* (Mardan White)) and its pink seedling, Mardan Pink, which will give a short but colourful display of white or pink, single flowers, set off by beautiful glossy foliage. As noted earlier, species roses do better in the colder parts of the plains,.

The Banksian roses, available in white and yellow, are also species types, which can be grown on the plains, especially the white Banksian, which does very well in places with a similar climate to Delhi, if grown as a weeping standard,

2. Among the old Tea roses, the most popular is Maréchal Niel, with its soft butter yellow globular flowers borne in great profusion. We can see this rose reaching up to the first floor i.e. 15 feet, in places like Poona and Bangalore. Another Tea rose that does well is the white flowered Lamarque, quite often used for fences in Delhi, and the rather similar Aimée Vibert. Celine Forestier, if you can get it, is a slightly more refined version of Lamarque with lovely pointed buds, white with a hint of lemon and attractive shining foliage.

3. Among the Hybrid Musks, one of the most reliable is Prosperity, a very vigorous scrambling rose which can easily reach 10 feet, or with drastic cutting, kept as a big shrub. This very healthy rose bears innumerable bunches of full, small flowers, off white with a flush of pink, almost like a rambler rose. One of the most adaptable of roses, I have seen Prosperity prosper in climates as varied as Trivandrum, Madras, Hyderabad and Delhi. Dr. Pal's seedling of Prosperity, Delhi White Pearl, is probably even more floriferous in the North Indian climate, and has the advantage of being a purer shade of white.

Another Hybrid Mask, Vanity, bears vivid pink single flowers some 3" across with utmost profusion. This is nearer a shrub than a climber but well worth growing. A modern Hybrid Mask is Elmshorn, which bears in profusion rambler like trusses in rich carmine pink.

4. Among the climbing sports could be mentioned the varieties Climbing Peace, very vigorous, and a rewarding performer in areas where the bush Peace does not grow well; Climbing First Prize and Climbing Paradise to name but a few, every year sees the introduction of more of these sports, but not all of them are free flowering.

Among the climbing sports of Floribundas one of the most reliable is Climbing Iceberg which bears white flowers, very freely on a vigorous plant.

Among climbing Miniatures mention must be made of Golden Century, in shades of pale orange, and yellow, Red Cascade, and Sea Foam, which bears large clusters of white flowers set off by shining foliage. There are many others but all, of course, much shorter than other climbers. One other climbing Miniature which deserves mention is the gay pink and white striped Candy Cane.

5. Coming to the modern perpetual flowering climbers, there is indeed quite a wealth of talent, so I will confine myself to only the good varieties according to colour groups.

Yellow:

The best is no doubt Golden Showers, a vigorous plant, with nice shiny foliage with semi double flowers of bright yellow. Others to be considered are Casino, which is more vigorous than Golden Showers, bearing a fuller but paler flower, and Royal

Gold, my personal favorite which is a more restrained grower, but which bears flowers of perfect H.T. form in richest shades of pure gold you can imagine. In fact in Australia, this variety is the favorite exhibition rose in this colour group.

For those who prefer the orange-yellows, we have Royal Sunset, which starts off a very appealing shade of orange-yellow, but unfortunately fades to buff the second day; and the more recent Highfield, with rounded blooms of chrome orange.

Red:

Among the red roses should be mentioned Sympathie, very well shaped blooms of dark red, borne on a vigorous plant, and the somewhat brighter Fountain, the latter one of the few to receive a Gold Medal from the Royal National Rose Society of UK, does very well in the cold climate of Kodaikanal.

Pink:

There are many more varieties available in the pink range. Among the rose pink we have New Dawn, in pale shell pink, and the slightly brighter colored Rosy Mantle, a very good rose indeed, with vigor, rich shining foliage and well shaped H.T. type flowers. In the salmon pink range are America, a vigorous and profuse plant, an American Rose Society winner, and my own seedling Kanyakumari, which bears H.T. type blooms but is rose that shorter than America.

Others include Compassion, more than the flower, the lovely bronzy foliage attracts attention and the bi-colored Handel with white reverse pink blooms, set off again by nice foliage.

Bicolors:

Taking up bi-colors, we have the attractive and aptly named Joseph's Coat – lovely confection of raspberry pink, red and yellow with a hint of oranges borne in great profusion the plant resembles more a climbing Floribunda than a H.T.; and the rather similar but newer Pinata.

A more vigorous climber in this group is Westerland, in shades of orange and yellow, which however does better only in the colder places.

Among the vermilion oranges we have Danse de Feu, the color of the H.T. Independence, but again one that does well only in cold climes. Another rose that could be grown is Danny Boy, which bears very well shaped blooms of brick red shaded orange on a sturdy plant.

White: Are comparatively rare, the only one I have grown is White Cockade, which makes more restrained growth than many others about 4-5 feet only and bears well shaped flowers of white with a hint of lemon.

As you can see there are quite a number of varieties in different color groups available among the climbing roses but if you have space for only say two, I suggest you grow Maréchal Niel and the incomparable Royal Gold.

One of the most exciting prospects in rose breeding is the development of rambler type climbing roses suitable for the plains of India. Here great progress could be achieved if wild roses of the type of *Rosa involucrata* – which incidentally grows by the side of streams in Ranchi – could be crossed with some of the modern perpetual flowering climbing roses.