

WHY FLORIBUNDAS

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I must warn you at the outset – I would like to convert you to the charm and colour of the Floribunda rose. Sincerely, I find it difficult to understand why there should be such a fascination for the Hybrid Tea type in our country when the trend throughout the world is in favour of Floribundas. No doubt, the Hybrid Tea is the aristocrat of the rose garden – tall and shapely with classic form, but, again like an aristocrat, somewhat exclusive. The Hybrid Tea has to be cultivated in separate beds devoted entirely to roses and simply will not tolerate inter-planting with other plants. With increasing urbanisation, land ceilings and what not, the modern garden is getting smaller, and it has already become difficult to set apart such exclusive areas for roses. It is in such a situation that in Europe and in the U.K. people are turning more and more to Floribunda roses which are far better landscaping plants and are quite happy in mixed company. I have myself grown Floribundas along with an assortment of annuals and dwarf perennial bedding plants and bulbs, such as gerberas, dwarf marigolds, amaryllis and zephyranthes and I am sure you can think of many other combinations.

Landscaping apart, floribundas are much more profuse, definitely healthier, and the colour range is far wider than the Hybrid Teas. By stages, the flower form which used to be informal has been improved so much that some of the modern floribundas, for e.g. 'Träumerei' (vermilion) can hold their own with the best of Hybrid Teas.

With all those qualities, it is time we gave Floribundas appropriate prominence in the rose garden.

The cultivation of the Floribunda rose is basically the same as that of the Hybrid Tea but there are, however, a few points of difference. First of all pruning has to be handled differently, with the main object of inducing those glorious basal shoots which will ultimately terminate in spectacular heads of blossom. The first year after planting, pruning should be fairly severe. Thereafter it is best to adopt a compromise between hard and moderate pruning. Every year, the two year old shoots are cut back severely while the one year old growth is moderately pruned. In the succeeding year, the moderately pruned shoots of the previous year will be severely cut back. If this approach is tried out, there will be much greater freedom of flowering and plenty of basal shoots. Apart from annual pruning, we have to know how to deal with flower trusses produced by the flowers in season after the flowers have faded. These have to be cut back to the first vegetative bud below the point of origin of the truss, though sometimes one cannot help feeling that so much of growth is being sacrificed. But unless this is done the plant soon becomes untidy, and freedom of flowering is greatly reduced.

I should mention that while growing Floribundas for exhibition the central bud on the typical flower cluster should be removed as early as possible, as this will mature much in advance of the rest of the flowers. One must also remember that Floribunda clusters take a few days longer to mature than Hybrid Tea flowers from the date of pruning.

Over the years I have grown many Floribundas and I present a selection, based entirely on my personal experience. So don't be annoyed if your favourite is missing. The varieties are grouped colour wise to make the job of selection easier, at least for those of you who are trying out Floribundas for the first time.

Starting with red – this is a colour group in which Floribundas excel and it has become really difficult to make a choice; but among the many contenders I would give top

billing to 'Europeana', with its glorious trusses velvety dark red, and striking dark foliage. Another attractive variety of a slightly brighter red is the Russian 'Flame of the East'. Mention should be made also of the exuberantly healthy and vigorous 'Tamango' with large flowers of cherry red, and that very attractive new comer 'Rob Roy', again vigorous with dark red foliage and Hybrid Tea type flowers of 'Ena Harkness' crimson.

Passing on to orange-reds, which perhaps is over represented, I would give priority to 'Zorina'. Here we have health, vigour, exquisite form and colour in a rose of sheer perfection which, in early spring, will take your breath away with an extravagance of bloom in scintillating shades of luminous coral orange. Another beauty is 'Anne Cocker', with flowers of lovely camellia form, and extraordinary lasting capacity in what may be called Dutch vermilion. In fact I have not come across a rose with better petal texture. Taller than these two are 'Fidelio' - orange red – and 'Träumerei', pure vermilion, both producing flowers of classic form singly or in small clusters.

In some ways, yellow is a section in which floribundas are yet to catch up with Hybrid Teas. But even so there is plenty of talent. My first choice would be 'Gold Topaz', which is a charming rose of saffron yellow and gold, lightly touched with pink at petal edges set off by shining foliage on a vigorous plant producing freely clusters of Hybrid Tea type blossoms. For those who prefer sulphur yellow there is 'Arthur Bell', again Hybrid Tea type, but with a tendency to grow very tall. The best for landscaping, however is 'Illumination', quite dwarf, with its huge clusters of single bright yellow flower edged pink.

In recent years there has been quite an advance in lilacs. First position should be awarded, I think to the very recent 'Shocking Blue', which produces well scented flowers in a most enthralling shade of dark orchid mauve with foliage to match. Others to look for in this range are 'Angel Face', one of the most strongly scented of all roses in shades of dark lilac edged pink and the slightly older 'Lilac Charm', single, but still one of the most beautiful, with its huge clusters of soft mauve contrasting admirably with its golden anthers and brownish purple stamens.

In the pink, white and cream classes, I should mention 'Pink Parfait', light rose pink, Hybrid Tea form and beautifully scented, and 'Traumland' which can best be described by its English name – 'Dreamland', producing flowers in large clusters single, but a most eye-catching shade of pure salmon pink, set off by chocolate brown anthers, like eyelashes on a pretty face.

Among the whites we have 'Iceberg' which is perhaps too well known to need description, but an outstanding new introduction in 'Grace Abounding', which lives truly up to its name and shows its Hybrid Musk parentage in the freedom with which it produces perfectly shaped flowers of lovely light butter yellow and cream.

Floribundas really come into their own when we take up the multi coloured class; here, there is a bewildering variety, but the best are the very aptly named 'Sea Pearl', 'Little Darling' - a tall bush, producing most willingly, clusters in yellow, pink and cream, and 'Charleston'- the best of the colour chargers – shapely blooms changing dramatically from bright yellow to pink and carmine. Unlike many of the colour changers, the flower remains attractive till the end. Even brighter is 'Joseph's Coat', which is a very tall bush or semi climber again appropriately named-- in fact, I cannot think of a colour it doesn't show at one stage or the other. I should not omit 'Banjaran', which is one of the brightest in this range, and endowed with excellent petal texture and shining foliage.

Apart from the conventional colour groups, Floribundas contain an unrivalled range of novel shades, which can hardly be matched by Hybrid Teas, and which are the flower arranger's delight. My favourite is 'Belinda', and till you see it you cannot believe that such a colour is possible-- a marvellous blend of orange, yellow and golden vermilion. No wonder with such a colour, as well as with perfect Hybrid Tea form, it has taken the cut flower market of Europe by storm. Turning to the softer hues I should mention 'Amberlight'

- with matching fragrance, a most unusual shade of honey brown. Two closely related roses are 'Vesper', Mars orange, and 'Tom Brown', Saturn red, both fragrant. One of the most extraordinary Floribundas is 'New Look', Hybrid Tea form, the colour of stained rosewood, dramatically contrasting with its clear white reverse of the petals.

Two very recent introductions in the Floribundas which represent a real break-through should be mentioned. 'Matangi' - one of the 'hand painted' roses, pastel vermillion with white reverse, and 'Gold Moss', one of the first of the perpetual flowering Moss roses, producing large size flowers of a bright, yellow. The entire plant, including the calyx of the flower, is covered with modified prickles or 'moss' - a real conversation piece in the garden.

If I may repeat myself, there can be no doubt that there is an unrivalled variety of form, plant habit and colour in the Floribunda rose and I am sure you will be able to give the class a rightful place in the rose garden remembering what the rest of the world has realized - small is beautiful.