

# Among the Roses

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Photo: Cindy Sayre

This summer rose enthusiasts from all over the world will gather in Vancouver to celebrate the rose. As host to the 2009 World Rose

Convention, Vancouver's rose gardens will be visited and admired by the experts and VanDusen Botanical Garden will be featured during the *Botanists Pride Tour* on June 21.

The theme of the convention is *Roses in the Landscape* with an emphasis on earth-friendly gardening techniques. It's the perfect opportunity for VanDusen to discuss the challenges we face growing roses on the wet West Coast and demonstrate sustainable methods for creating a beautiful, healthy rose garden right here in Vancouver. Yes, it is possible!

## Hidden Treasures in VanDusen's Rose Collections

VanDusen displays a surprising diversity of roses, from our Formal and Heritage Rose Gardens, to Canadian-bred roses, climbers and rose species found throughout the Garden.

Some of the most intriguing roses can be seen in our new Heritage Rose Garden, featuring historical varieties, some centuries old. Here you'll find one of the oldest cultivated

roses, the apothecary's rose (*Rosa gallica* var. *officinalis*) which was discovered depicted on a surviving mural in the ancient ruins of Pompeii, Italy. Nearby are the curious moss roses, named for the soft fuzzy growth that covers their buds and stems, or the crested moss rose (*Rosa* 'Cristata') with its cockscomb-like sepals. The oddest of all would have to be the green rose (*Rosa odorata* 'Viridiflora'), with its leafy green petals that smell of pepper. From the colder regions of Canada hail the Canadian-bred roses. Not only are they pest and disease resistant, they are hardy from Zones 3 to 8. Venture up to our Canadian Heritage Garden to find some of the finest introductions, like the deep red, repeat bloomer *Rosa* 'Emily Carr' from the new Canadian Artist™ series.

Here you'll also come across some of BC's native rose species. The showiest of these, Nootka rose (*Rosa nutkana*), has large, ethereal, pale pink blooms and edible hips that can be dried and used in tea – an excellent source of Vitamin C.

## Growing Roses in the Rain

VanDusen's rose collections have a somewhat chequered past. In a climate that is less than ideal for growing roses; inadequate irrigation

Photo: Cindy Sayre

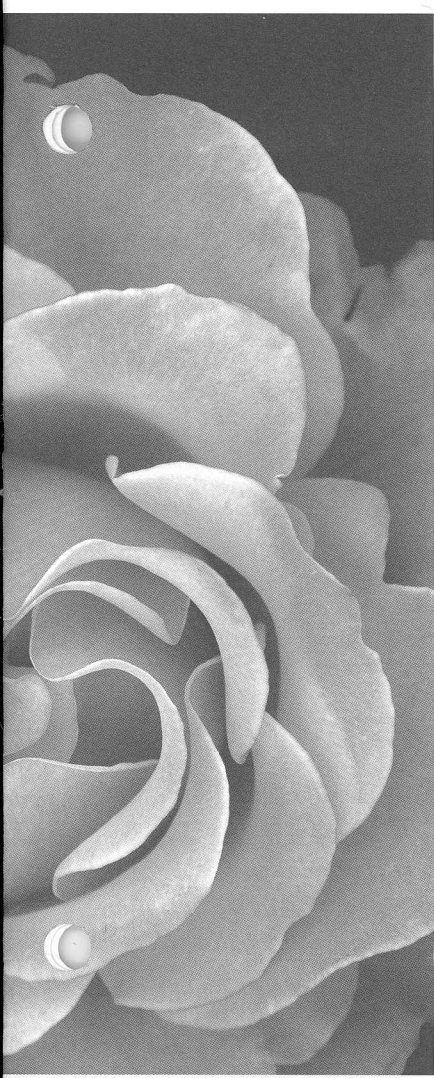


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and unhealthy soils (with pesticide residues from the outdated practices of years past) have added to the challenges we face in maintaining a vibrant, healthy rose collection.

Over the years we've learned some hard lessons and with much trial and error VanDusen's rose collections are now looking better than ever. Our philosophy to growing roses can be summarized in four simple steps:

- 1. Grow hardy varieties that are proven to be pest and disease resistant in our wet climate.** This is the single most important factor to ensuring a successful rose garden. With so many varieties available on the market, the only challenge is choosing which ones to grow. We've been working closely with local rose expert Brad Jalbert of Select Roses to choose the beautiful new varieties you'll find in our Formal Rose Garden.
- 2. Practice sustainable gardening.** Gone are the days of bombarding your roses with chemical-laden fertilizers and pesticides. Today's rose gardener uses a variety of earth-friendly products combined with companion plants like catmint (*Nepeta*) to attract beneficial insects. This year we will also be experimenting with compost tea and Neem oil (a vegetable oil) as pre-emergent anti-fungal treatments.

To provide our roses with the nutrients they need, we mulch the beds each spring with well-decomposed compost that is rich in leaf matter. Nitrogen-rich alfalfa meal and blood meal are applied in May.

- 3. Maintenance, maintenance, maintenance!** This means regular watering, preferably with drip irrigation, to ensure healthy plants that are never stressed. We also recommend watering deeply and less frequently to encourage a healthy vigorous root system. A plant under stress from drought or other factors is more susceptible to disease.

**Far top left:** Formal Rose Garden in 2008.

**Top left:** Disease-resistant floribunda rose (*Rosa Tuscan Sun*)

**Left:** Canadian hybrid moyesii rose (*Rosa 'Eddie's Crimson'*)

**Top right:** BC native, Nootka rose (*Rosa nutkana*)

**Right:** Heritage crested moss rose (*Rosa 'Cristata'*), introduced in 1827.



Photo: Gerald and Irmingard Carter

- 4. Learn from your mistakes.** If a rose doesn't perform well, replace it with a more disease-resistant variety. Think of it as an opportunity to experiment and try something new.

This approach appears to be paying off. Last summer, for the first time in years, VanDusen's Formal Rose Garden received rave reviews. What changed? Hard work and a commitment to implementing new sustainable gardening practices.

While roses have long been considered some of the most difficult plants to grow, that perception is changing. With such diversity in form, colour and fragrance, and the wide availability of varieties that are pest and disease resistant, there is truly a rose for everyone.

**Fun Facts:** The earliest depiction of a rose, a fresco found in the Minoan Palace in Crete, dates back to the sixteenth century BC.

**To find the best roses for your garden, check out:** *Roses for British Columbia*, by Brad Jalbert and Laura Peters (Lone Pine Press), available in VanDusen's library.



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