

OLD ROSES AS SPECIMEN SHRUBS IN MIAMI-DADE

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Abstract. For at least 10 years the survival of 'old' roses (principally Chinas, Teas, Bourbons and Noisettes) grown on their own roots has been assessed in the oolitic limestone soil of south Miami-Dade. An organically enriched soil was used as backfill, the plants mulched with pine bark nuggets, and a com-

plete slow release fertilizer applied every 3 months. After 10 years, of the 27 cultivars planted, 6 out of 8 China roses were thriving, plus 5 out of 9 Teas and both Noisettes. 'Maggie' apart (a putative Bourbon), the other 3 roses in this class were disappointing. 'Cecile Brunner' and a found rose (probably 'spray Cecile Brunner') bloomed well and presented few problems. Over the period of the study no insecticides or fungicides were used. Regular maintenance consisted of deadheading and pruning to remove diseased or dead canes. It is concluded that Tea, China and Noisette roses should be considered viable options as specimen shrubs in Miami-Dade landscapes.

Since the early 1980s there has been a growing revival in the use of what have been termed 'old roses', roses that for the most part pre-date the ascendancy of the modern Hybrid Tea roses. Their appealing form makes many of them useful as specimen shrubs as compared to the more open often

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sparingly foliaged 'Hybrid Tea' roses. Although the blooms do not rival the panoply of showy colors seen in 'Hybrid Tea' and modern 'Floribunda' roses, the subtle pastel color blends of many old roses adds a soothing tone to the tropical landscape. In addition old roses normally do not require routine applications of pesticides, and survive with less frequent irrigation.

In the present study roses were grown on their own roots and planted directly in the ground as part of a residential landscape in Homestead, south Miami-Dade County, an area with at best a thin layer of gravelly topsoil (1-4 inches) over Miami Limestone. An organically enriched soil was used as backfill and a 3 inch layer of pine bark nugget mulch maintained. Every 3-4 months a slow release 13/3/13 fertilizer was applied. Apart from deadheading and removal of diseased/dead canes, little other routine maintenance was required. No pesticides or fungicides have ever been used since the roses were installed.

Results and Discussion

China Roses. These are the most successful class of roses grown so far. Foliage diseases have been negligible, with dieback less evident than for other roses. There were two exceptions: both 'Beauty of Rosemawr' and a rose received as the China, 'Eugene de Beauharnais' (Hardy 1837) failed to establish and were removed within the first two years. The true identity of this latter rose is uncertain but it is thought to be a China/Bourbon hybrid. As expected, the China roses proved most amenable to pruning, the larger cultivars recovering well from removal of up to 20% live wood. The following China roses all became well established in the landscape: 'Mutabilis' rapidly grew into a somewhat sprawling 8 × 10 ft shrub, with many coppery pink to light pink single flowers despite only 4-6 h of sun daily. 'Cramoisi Superieur' has grown into an extremely vigorous 8-10 ft, densely foliaged, floriferous shrub, with fade resistant blooms, and excellent drought tolerance. 'Old Blush' is maintained as a 4-5 ft shrub, and has proved to be the most tolerant of drought and poor nutrition of all roses grown in this study—neglected plants showed excellent recovery following pruning and fertilizer application. 'La Vesuve' grew into a medium sized 5 × 3 ft shrub, not as heavily foliaged as the above China roses, but with outstanding, more refined, silvery pink double flowers. 'Ducher' with smaller white double flowers has grown to about 3 ft, and flowered well but is not as vigorous or well foliaged as the previous three roses. This could reflect excessive shade, less than 4 h of direct sun, as the same roses in containers have grown into more compact denser plants with a minimum of 6 h sun. A final rose in this group, 'Vincent Godsiff' (found Bermuda Rose, putative China) produced the twiggy growth typical of China roses, forming a 5 ft shrub with more upright growth than would be expected of a China rose. Flowering was profuse with ample foliage, though leaf drop was quite noticeable after flowering.

Tea Roses. Overall, these roses are proving only slightly less successful than the above Chinas—not quite as vigorous, with foliage diseases and stem cankers somewhat more prevalent. Leaf loss due to blackspot was at most transitory, and dieback due to stem cankers was fully controlled by pruning as necessary. Despite a full sun exposure, 'Francis Dubreuil' lacked vigor and was removed within two years. 'Duchesse de Brabant' was disappointing: naturally inclined to be open with at

times sparse foliage, it had to be removed after eight years. Developing competition from tree roots of a *Schefflera actinophylla* on a neighboring property could in part have contributed to its unthrifty appearance. Both 'Perle des Jardins' and 'Mlle Franziska Kruger' suffer occasionally from balling and petal blight, and although not as vigorous as the remaining Tea roses have proved attractive if careful attention is paid to promptly eliminating diseased canes.

The remaining six Tea roses have proved most successful as specimen landscape shrubs and are listed (subjectively) in order of overall appearance: 'Mrs B. R. Cant' rapidly developed into a large, floriferous shrub to 8-10 ft with excellent repeat flowering and good drought tolerance; 'Marie Van Houtte' has proved somewhat more sprawling and slightly less vigorous, developing into an attractive 6-7 ft shrub with impressive blooms—drought tolerant, though flowering more reliable when watered during prolonged dry periods. 'Mons. Tillier' has formed a classic vase-shaped 8 ft Tea rose. The deep carmine double blossoms are especially attractive if somewhat less fade resistant than the previous two Teas. Mrs. Dudley Cross has been known locally as the 'Key West Thornless' for many years and resembles a less vigorous version of 'Marie Van Houtte', for which it can substitute if space is a consideration. Growing to about 4 ft, it has proved to be especially intolerant of shade. 'Dr. Grill' has formed an open 3-4 ft shrub, the attractive coppery pink blossoms compensating for the somewhat sparse foliage, though in this latter regard partial shade and competing tree roots need to be taken into consideration. Although 'Mme Berkeley' was able to survive increasing shade, eventual relocation of this rose to a more sunny location improved both the number and quality of blooms (a light orangey pink). Growing to about 4 ft, this has developed into a more open shrub than stated in earlier accounts. Two tea roses, Souvenir de Thérèse Levet and Isabella Sprunt, were removed in Nov.1999 following storm damage from Hurricane Irene. At that time both roses were thriving.

Noisette Roses. These are scendent to climbing roses that usually require support. For 'Crépuscule' this has involved an 8-10 ft section of a chain link fence. This rose flowers profusely in late fall and again in late winter, and more sporadically in mid-late spring. The clusters of orangey apricot flowers are most attractive, but are prone to fade rapidly in hot sun. This rose was the only one grown in the present study to develop any specific nutritional deficiencies (iron/manganese). 'Felleberg' has thrived and bloomed reliably despite partial shade and infrequent irrigation. This was one of the few roses obtained from a local nursery, and appears well adapted to conditions in Miami-Dade. The final rose in this section was grown from a cutting of a rose found in a Homestead yard planted circa World War II. Originally believed to be a Noisette, possibly 'Belle Vichysoise', it appears now to be almost certainly 'spray Cecile Brunner' (Polyantha), a large, vigorous, sprawling shrub maintained at 6-8 ft and a spread of 10-12 ft, which responds well to pruning. The clusters of small fragrant flowers are at first pale pink with a deeper blush pink center, then fade to almost white pom-pom like blooms as they fully open.

Bourbon Roses. Of the four roses in this class, both 'Coquette de Blanche' and 'Honorine de Brabant' lacked vigor, flowered poorly and were removed. 'Souvenir de la Malmaison' grew and flowered well for about 7-8 years, however it declined with increasing shade and tree root competition. 'Maggie' (found rose, W. C. Welch) is believed to be one of

the 'Bourbon' roses developed by Geschwindt at the turn of the 19th Ct. It has proved extremely vigorous, developing a scandent habit with long prickly canes (not thornless as in some descriptions) growing to 6-8 ft. Flowering is profuse with deep carmine red, fade resistant blooms.

Miscellaneous. 'Buff Beauty' a Hybrid Musk rose (not regarded as an old rose) is reputedly well adapted to partial shade and bloomed reliably under the partial shade of a *Ziziphus mauritanea*. However because of sparse foliage and poor growth, the rose was removed. The Polyantha 'Cecile Brunner' is one of the most popular of old roses and proved to be floriferous and trouble free over the period of the study.

Conclusions

This study has established that several classes of old roses can be grown on their own roots as specimen shrubs in Miami-Dade without resort to the use of pesticides. One of the principal reasons for using *Rosa fortuniana* grafted roses in south and central Florida is resistance to damage from root

knot nematodes, but this does not appear to present a problem in south Miami-Dade. In other parts of the county (e.g., north east) the soil is more sandy and it would be advisable to submit samples for a soil nematode assay before choosing own root roses. Old roses grown on their own roots were preferred because they are more readily available, and easier for the home gardener to propagate. Many tropical trees are especially prone to develop surface roots, a situation aggravated by the thin soil and underlying limestone in Miami-Dade. This needs to be taken into account when placing roses in the landscape—as noted above several of the roses grown appeared to lack vigor in the presence of encroaching tree roots. Routine maintenance was less than for locally grown Hybrid Tea roses: pesticides were not required (including control of blackspot), and there was less need for both fertilizer and supplemental water. However it was found important to deadhead old roses and regularly inspect them for diseased canes. Tea, China and Noisette roses should be more widely used as specimen shrubs in Miami-Dade County, and considered as alternatives to *Ixora* spp. or *Hibiscus chinensis*.