

Tea roses — once almost forgotten — are now being celebrated again for their elegance and beauty and acclaimed as superb shrubs for warm gardens.

Descended from Chinese garden hybrids introduced into Europe in the early nineteenth century, Tea roses have long been considered in a class of their own for their exquisite colours, distinctive fragrance, fine foliage and almost constant flushes of flowers in warmer climates. They were looked upon as almost perfect roses, but the passage of time and the vagaries of fashion saw them lose favour and all but disappear.

The authors have covered the history of Tea roses, their rise and fall in popularity and the nomenclature problems that arose during their revival when interest in old roses was rekindled in the later twentieth century. Readers will find many questions answered and some old mysteries unravelled. Full details are given of Tea roses currently sold in Australia, with the authors bringing together their observations and knowledge of the Teas they grow — the descriptions are first-hand and not just a repetition of what has been said before.

Lavishly illustrated with colour photographs and historical plates, this book invites you to share the beauty and the fascinating story of the Teas — but be warned — once captivated by these lovely roses there is no going back.

Lynne Chapman, Noelene Drage, Di Durston, Jenny Jones, Hillary Merrifield and Billy West are long-term members of the Perth Region of Heritage Roses in Australia.

Known as the Tea Rose Group, we came together because of a mutual love of the Teas which flourish in our climate. At first we were just interested in growing these beautiful roses but soon wanted to bring together as many as possible and to learn more about them. We now grow all the Teas in commerce in Australia, as well as others yet to be identified.

Finding information about these once very popular roses proved to be more difficult than we had expected. We realized that we would have to do our own investigation into the Teas, combining our various skills in botany, horticulture, historical research, photography, languages and writing. This book is the outcome and is the first to have been devoted solely to Tea roses for over 100 years.

Although questions still remain, we feel that the time has come to share what we know about the Teas and to recommend them as rewarding plants for warmer gardens.

Sample pages

Planting

Because many Tea roses grow into large bushes that can live for a long time, it is worthwhile spending extra time and effort on preparing planting sites. Where soils are heavy and drainage poor, it may be well to consider raising the beds, as Teas will not tolerate wet feet. Regardless of soil type, the prior addition of organic matter is beneficial, while surface mulching with pea or lucerne hay, straw or similar materials helps to insulate the roots from extremes in temperature.

In time, Teas tend to become tall and spreading, so allow plenty of space between the individual plants. On the whole, they do not take kindly to transplanting and may take years to recover their vigour and flower size. Take this into consideration if the transplanted rose is to play an important role in a garden scheme, as it may sometimes be better to purchase a new plant of the same variety.

Growing conditions

Although a situation in full sun is usually recommended for roses, Teas will also do well where sunlight is filtered through deciduous trees, while some of the darker varieties benefit from afternoon shade in very hot summers. Planting in shady areas may lead to taller, more spindly growth.

Tea roses do not have a natural dormancy period and if they receive a regular supply of water and fertiliser they will flower and grow almost continuously in warmer areas. If young plants are well watered for several years until their root systems are well developed, they will then survive on a stricter watering regime. Established bushes are capable of withstanding harsh conditions, but bloom quality and quantity will suffer if little water is available. When planting, the use of slow-release fertiliser mixed into the soil under the rose has been found to be beneficial, and the application of subsequent nutrients will need to be balanced with the available water supply — when water is limited, feed sparingly.



Pruning

In 1931, Australian horticulturist George Knight wrote, 'Tea roses, to obtain the best results, should not be pruned heavily at any time; only a very light pruning is necessary. In fact, I think it advantageous to occasionally miss a season altogether', and this advice still holds good. Almost all Teas merit hard pruning. If they are pruned in the same severe manner as Hybrid Teas, the plants may take several years to recover, or may not recover at all!

There are many accounts of huge old Tea roses luxuriantly growing and blooming despite not being tended for many years. However, in most gardens some trimming is necessary to keep them to a manageable size, remove dead wood and encourage a more compact growth habit.

Because the beautiful foliage of Tea roses is as important a feature as the blooms, they should be trimmed between flowering flushes as you would other decorative shrubs, but with a light hand. Regular dead-heading encourages continuous blooming, and shortening the stems by about three eyes when removing spent blooms and hips will produce a well-shaped plant.

Pruned Teas need to be trimmed often to maintain the required shape and size, and those grown in gardens with limited space will also respond well to this treatment. Clusters may take three to five years to form their framework and flower to their full potential so it is best not to cut them back too hard when young.

Whether trimming a Tea rose between flowering flushes, or cutting back a large, old unpruned plant, the general rule of thumb is that no more than one third of the bush should be removed at any one time.

Propagating

Most Tea roses strike easily from cuttings and grow well on their own roots. The taking of cuttings is an ideal and inexpensive way of increasing your own stock and making sure furnishings do not disappear altogether. Another alternative is to collect budwood in the summer and then contact your local rose nursery for their assistance in budding it on, if you do not feel confident about doing this yourself.

Cutting-propagated Teas may take a little longer to establish but soon catch up with budded ones. However, mainly for economic reasons, most of the Teas available today in Australia are grafted plants. Commonly used



'Climbing Comtesse de Lubersac' at Arden Botanic Park, Waverley, Australia

'Safrano'

Breeder: Beaumont, France, 1839
Parentage: Seedling of 'Père's Yellow Tea Scented China' (F)
Sponsor: 'Isabella Spence', Spence/Buchanan, USA, 1855/1865

One of the earliest and most enduring of the Teas, 'Safrano' grows well in warm and cold conditions. This toughness was noted in 1848 by English writer and nurseryman William Paul, who classed 'Safrano' among the lignose or woody Teas that could be left in the ground and did not need to be over-wintered in glasshouses. However, it is its temperate climates that 'Safrano' shows its finest qualities and has developed a reputation for the beauty and abundance of its cool weather blooms.

At the turn of the century, 'Safrano' was grown in huge numbers on the French Riviera for the winter floristry trade. The elegant buds were sent all over Europe by rail and across the English Channel to London. It thrived so well on the French Riviera that English rosarians living there at the turn of the century said that it grew almost wild (Wyatt 1975).

In recent times it is common to read that 'Safrano' was the result of the first attempt at controlled hybridisation, and that it was raised from the seed of 'Père's Yellow Tea Scented China', crossed either with 'Noisette 'Desprez' (Hurst 1941) or 'the lilac-pink Bourbon Mme Desprez' (Robinson, E. E., 1969). Early writers agree that 'Safrano' was probably raised



Distinguishing Features

Influences and parent
Solitary, single stems, compound stems, pedicel slightly bent, glabrous, occasionally prickly

Bud shape and colour
Slender, pointed, pale apricot, minimal carmine, soft wash at base

Sepals
Scattered glands on outer surface

Flower size and shape
Medium to large (8-11 cm); semi-double to very double (20-30 petals); loosely infundibul, petals curl and rickel with age

Flower colour
Apricot to pinkish buff, fades pale
'Isabella Spence' larvae yellow, pink at apex

'E. Veyrat Hermanos'

Breeder: Dervin, France, 1894
Parentage: Unknown
Sponsor: 'Père de Gold'

At the time of writing, this rose is in commerce in Australia as 'Mme Bérand', Lyon, France, 1870.

This climbing Tea was collected from the Healesville area of Victoria and introduced into commerce in Australia in the mid-1900s. Although initially identified as the Dijon Tea 'Mme Bérand', it does not match early descriptions of that rose, including William Robinson's 1903 comment that 'one striking characteristic is that it is almost thornless', and Henry Elwanger's observation in 1882 that 'Madame Bérand' was very similar to its parent, 'Gloire de Dijon', but with flowers that were 'somewhat less full, of a fresher shade, and — better in the bud state'. A few stems of the rose from Healesville are 'thornless', but most carry strong prickles, which are denser towards the base of the plant. In addition, it is a very full rose, having up to 160 petals, and could not be called 'somewhat less full' than 'Gloire de Dijon'.

'E. Veyrat Hermanos' is grown in Europe and the United States, and comparisons have shown it to be identical to the Healesville rose. A recommended climber for many years, it was widely available in Australia from the turn of the century until the Second World War (Appendix IV). One of the earliest roses to propagate from cuttings, 'E. Veyrat Hermanos' was used as an understock in the past, which may be why it has been found thriving anonymously in old



Distinguishing Features

Influences and parent
Solitary, single stems, large compound stems, pedicel straight, moderately glabrous and leafy

Bud shape and colour
Plump, spat, petal edges slightly curled or crinkled, buff with carmine streaking

Sepals
A few glands on outer surface, reflex early

Flower size and shape
Medium (8-9 cm); very double (up to 150 petals); cup-shaped; edges of outer petals curl under centre; inner petals straight or symmetrically quilled

Flower colour
Vivid, light yellow and pink buff; centre often darker; yellow to orange towards base; dark marginal yellow tints; occasionally blotched bright pink or suffused dark carmine

Bud shape and texture