

Playing the Fringes

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Several years ago at a Deep South District Mid-Winter Meeting, the District Chair of Judges, Anita Smith, offered some interesting advice on exhibiting roses. In the course of introducing some of the District's most successful exhibitors of hybrid teas and miniatures, she made a statement something to the effect that "I would leave the tough exhibiting to these young bucks and just play the fringes".

John and I knew exactly what she meant and took it to heart. At the time, we had been in the rose society only a couple of years but had quickly come to realize how stiff the competition was in the hybrid tea and miniature classes. Fortunately, we had roses in our garden from several other classes with different flower forms and different growth habits. It was roses from such "fringe" classes that Anita was talking about. We never thought Anita was trying to discourage DSD members from exhibiting hybrid teas and miniatures. Instead, we believe that she was trying to encourage them to also exhibit in areas where they might have the best chance of succeeding and go from there. She wanted them to be encouraged by their efforts, not discouraged.

EXHIBITING IN THE FRINGE CLASSES

We have come to consider the fringe classes to be the floribundas, polyanthas, climbers, shrubs, and old garden roses. Many of the specimens from these classes are exhibited as sprays because that is the way many of them grow. When sprays are exhibited, the focus often tends to be on the overall impression of combined flower and foliage rather than on precise form and detail of a single bloom as is often the case when hybrid teas or miniatures are exhibited. The following information on sprays may be of some help in selecting and grooming sprays for a rose show.

A spray is a group of three or more florets on one stem. A floret is an individual bloom within a spray. Sprays vary greatly in overall size, shape, number and size of individual florets, and the manner in which they hang or extend from the main stem. Regardless of class, each spray should be selected and groomed for exhibition with good *balance and proportion* in mind. This means that the spray should have a uniform shape overall (with no blooms or stems extending above or below the mass of the spray to create a break in uniformity), and it should rest atop a stem with foliage that extends far enough above the top of the vase to be pleasing to the eye. In many cases, a section of stem possessing two sets of leaves below the lowest lateral will provide that extent.

The ideal spray is one whose florets are equal in freshness and are as evenly spaced within the cluster as possible. Both of these qualities can be encouraged on the bush by pinching out the terminal bud before the buds start to open. This eliminates the bud that usually opens first and often produces a floret that becomes "stale" by the time the other buds open. Early removal usually allows enough time for remaining buds to spread out as they open and fill the void created by removal of the lead bud. The result is a spray with equally fresh and evenly spaced flowers. It is also desirable for all the flowers to be of equal degree of openness, but it is not always possible. Sometimes partially open buds may frame a fully open bloom and make it attractive enough to exhibit. This is an area where experience will help in making the best decision.

There is plenty of time to prune bushes to help get good blooms for our Rose Show on April 25th. Nearly ten full weeks are left between now and then. Keep your plants well watered during that time and be sure to fertilize them after they are fully leafed out. When collecting specimens to exhibit, remember to leave the stems as long as possible, immerse them in water immediately after cutting, and label each variety by name.

At our April 11th meeting various types of sprays will be brought in for demonstration and discussion, if they are in bloom by then or at least far enough along in development to be useful. Members are encouraged to bring in any specimens (sprays or otherwise) that they would like advice on for exhibiting.