

Rose Exhibiting 101 By Cindy Dale (all photos by Cindy Dale except 'Dublin')

Rose show season is here and you may be considering trying your luck at exhibiting. Many beginning exhibitors are plagued with doubts about how their roses can possibly compete. Don't let these anxieties hold you back! A novice beat me out for Queen of Show a few years ago. It just depends on who has the best quality of blooms and how they're entered. Beginners *can* win!

There are novice and small garden classes in almost every rose show and these are where you get your feet wet in the world of exhibiting. Novice classes are open to anyone who has not won a blue ribbon in an American Rose Society sanctioned rose show but you can also enter any other class in the show schedule. Also, remember that all of the big time rose exhibitors started as novices. These very rosarians stand ready to help you now. Of course, you need to start by providing your roses the basics of amended soil, lots of water, plenty of fertilizer and disease and insect control, but let's look at some exhibiting "tricks of the trade" that just may help you in showing your roses.

1. Disbud early and often. Disbudding refers to removing side buds that appear near the main or terminal bud. These smaller buds use up energy that is needed for the terminal bud to achieve its full potential, detract from the appearance of the bloom, and are prohibited for showing in most single bloom classes. The earlier in the growing cycle these side buds are removed the better since there will be less of a scar left behind. The exception to removing the side buds is when a show schedule (another term for "program") calls for a spray or cluster of blooms. Then, the main bud would be the one to be pinched out so that the side buds will grow and fill in the center hole. Again, this is done as early as possible. Antique Roses,

Species Roses, and Climbers may be shown with side buds but may be penalized if the side buds are distracting.

2. Cutting and conditioning roses for the show.

You can start cutting roses at the beginning of show week if you have a refrigerator that you can store them in. Over time, you will learn which roses maintain their form and substance (freshness) over several days and which don't. For instance, 'Uncle Joe,' 'Veterans' Honor,' and 'Touch of Class' are slow openers. They can be cut, conditioned, and brought inside with or without refrigeration for a few days whereas; 'Pristine' is a fast opener and should be cut tight and close to show day. The proper procedure for cutting roses is as follows:

a. Early in the morning carry a large bucket of water out to the garden. Select blooms to cut that are about 1/2-2/3 open. Cut the stems 22-26" long to allow for recutting later and place them in the bucket. Immediately label the rose with the name of the variety since many varieties look alike and you can be disqualified for entering a rose with the wrong name. I buy small, paper tags with string on them at an office supply store for this purpose. Bring the bucket inside. Fill a second bucket with the warm tap water and floral preservative. Diagonally cut each stem again, under water, and place in the second bucket. Use enough buckets so that the blooms have plenty of space and foliage does not become entangled.

b. Store the roses in a cool, dim place until the water cools completely. This is called "hardening off." Wash and trim your foliage at this point like I do (see paragraph 5) or hold off on doing it til the night before the show. If the blooms don't need to be or can't be refrigerated at this point then you are done except for checking the bushes every day and harvesting likely candidates. Pre-cut roses should be examined every day and those that are past their prime discarded.

3. Refrigeration. If you have extra space in your refrigerator, this is an excellent way to store most blooms and you can start cutting earlier in show week. Some varieties are not suitable for refrigeration because they will change color ('Mister Lincoln' and 'Rina Hugo') or the petals will ruffle and close up ('Pristine'). The refrigerator should be set at 36-38 degrees. No fruits and vegetables should be stored in the refrigerator since they can give off ethylene gases that can harm the roses, and blooms should not touch the sides of the refrigerator. Place sandwich bags gently over the blooms to prevent (continued on page 7)



FB spray 'Black Cherry.' No gap in center, fresh stamens, shiny foliage, blooms open same amount

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(continued from page 6) the refrigerated air from drying them out. Larger plastic bags can be used to cover sprays. You will need to remove certain roses from refrigeration the night before the show so that they can open a little further or “relax.” Knowing which ones these are comes with experience.

4. Assemble your tool kit. Buy a roomy tool, tackle, or sewing box (or use a zippered plastic bag if you’re just starting out) and use it to carry everything to the show that you will need to prep and enter your roses. Restock it after each show. Basic items needed are: cotton balls and Q-tips to hold the petals open, a small pair of scissors for trimming petals and pinking shears for trimming foliage, pruners for cutting off excess stem length, tweezers, small paint brushes for wiping dirt or bugs off the petals, eye dropper, trash bag and scotch tape to tape the bag to your prep table, pens and pencils, return address labels for the entry tags, wedging material such as green Styrofoam or oasis, paper towels for washing the leaves, extra entry tags and rubber bands, the show schedule, and the *ARS Handbook for Selecting Roses* for checking the spelling and class for all entries and year of introduction for Old Garden Rose classes.

5. T’was the night before the show. Bring all your cut roses out of storage and discard any that are not show-worthy. Blue ribbon qualities will be discussed later. If you have not cleaned your foliage, wet some paper towels and wash every leaf to remove dirt and spray residue. Polish foliage with a soft cloth to make it shine. Do not apply any artificial substances to make the leaves shiny. They are prohibited by ARS rules. With your pinking shears, cut around any holes in the leaf edges created by chewing insects. Entry tags are attached to each vase entered and they come in large size for large blooms such as Hybrid Teas and small for Miniatures. If possible, get some tags and an exhibitor’s number ahead of time from the show committee. Fill out as much of the information on the top and bottom of the tag as possible, using return address labels instead of having to write the name and address. Review the show schedule, using a highlighter to mark the classes you plan to enter. Blooms that need to be kept at their current stage of openness will be placed back in the refrigerator. Leave others out at room temperature that need to open more. Go to bed early!

6. Show time! Get up early and allow for extra

time to bring out all roses and go through the garden one last time. The last things to do are: put on your sweater, turn up the air conditioner in the car, and load up the roses, tool kit, and camera. Loading is done last so that roses are not sitting in a hot car. Tightly wedge buckets into place to prevent tipping over. Minis can be placed in 16 ounce plastic party cups, sorted by variety, and transported in a box or pre-chilled cooler. Be careful driving over bumps or around corners.

7. Prep area activities. The show schedule will tell you when the prep area is open. The number of entries you have and the amount of advance work you have done will help you decide what time to get there but always allow plenty of time so you can find supplies such as tags, vases, and bowls for floaters, and to ask questions. Find a table with good light and set up your tool kit and supplies. Make your final decisions about which roses to enter in which class. Entering two of the same variety in the same class is a disqualification. Fill out the remaining information on the entry tag. Secure the tag to the vase by looping the rubber band through the hole in the tag and around the vase and fold up the bottom of the tag before entering the rose. As you work, keep an eye on the time so that you get your entries in by the cut-off time and clean up your area before leaving. Donate unused roses for bouquet sales.

8. Exhibition or “Queen of Show” form. One of the top prizes in a rose show is the Queen of Show and is given to the best one-bloom-per-stem Hybrid Tea or Grandiflora. Other royalty awards are King for second, and Princess for third. Most shows also have a Court of Honor for the runners up. Blooms vying for Queen must be at “exhibition stage.” This means that the bloom is $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ open with a tight, high, spiraled center and petals that are symmetri-

cally open on the outer rows. From the side, the bloom has a triangular appearance with the lower petals extending straight out on all sides (not falling below the horizontal plane) and the inner rows becoming tighter and higher with the center at the

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HT, 'Stephanie Ann' showing exhibition form

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(continued from page 7) highest point. The ideal queen candidate also has a long, straight stem, is disease and insect-damage free, has all leaves present on the stem, and is clean and well groomed.

9. Rose Grooming (also known as “prepping”). Growing a fabulous rose is a good start but it's the proper grooming of that rose that makes it a winner. Learning the art of grooming takes practice. Most of it is learned by watching experienced exhibitors then trying the techniques yourself. Usually, the “old pros” will be glad to answer your questions. Just remember, at the show they are working against the clock too and try not to take up too much of their time. Proper grooming consists of the following:

a. Foliage should have already been cleaned and shined at home but give it another look in case you

missed a leaf.

b. Stem length above the vase should be 5-6 times the height of the bloom to maintain balance and proportion. That is, a huge bloom would look out of proportion with a short stem and a small bloom would look strange with a very tall stem. As a rule, a stem length of 16”-19” above the

vase opening is perfectly acceptable for the average Hybrid Tea bloom.

c. If allowed in the schedule, stems are wedged in the vase so that the rose stands upright. This is accomplished by forcing pieces of green Styrofoam, floral foam (also called oasis), aluminum foil, paper towel, or anything else specified in the schedule, on one or both sides of the stem. Wedges cannot extend above the top of the vase. Many shows provide wedging but I prefer to bring my own in case they run out.

d. Check your disbudding one more time to make sure you removed all side growth. If you need to remove anything, apply a drop of water with your eye dropper or finger to prevent discoloring. Brown scars caused by previous disbudding should be freshened by lightly scraping and applying a drop of water.

e. If a bloom is too tight it can be opened by gently spreading the petals and inserting cotton balls or Q-tips to help them relax. They are kept in this position while working on other entries but all foreign objects must be removed before taking the roses to the placement table for entry.



HT Open Bloom, 'Deidre Hall'

f. Open bloom entries should be fully open with stamens showing and fresh, not dried out or brown. Small petaloids in the very center of the bloom may be removed with tweezers to

create a more pleasing, open ap-

pearance but don't remove too many or the judges will say it has been “plucked” to create an artificially open look.

g. In most shows there is a class that calls for blooms to be floated in a large brandy snifter or bowl. Normally, there is no foliage or stem allowed to be showing in this class.



Floating 'Dublin' by the Lundbergs

Miniature blooms are exhibited in the same way as “standard” or large blooms. There are classes for Miniature Royalty, open bloom, floaters, etc. and prepping is similar

to that for standard size blooms.

I hope these tips help you with your exhibiting. **Good luck and I hope to see you at the shows!**



Cindy's English Box of six 'Moonstones'



Walt & Linda with prize winners. Note the difference in the balance and proportion of the two entries.