

TIME FOR TEA

Ruth Boundy

I first became smitten by the beauty of these wonderful tea roses when visiting Mottisfont with the Somerset Group. I just thought these roses were so aristocratic; they reminded me of an age of beautiful houses and beautiful people. I thought I would try to grow some of them, so I embarked on my collection. Some have been a huge success, and others a total disaster!

First the successes: *Rosa* 'Lady Hillingdon', raised in 1917, must be one of the easiest to grow. She is the most wonderful soft apricot colour and is still flowering now in December. So, too, is repeat flowering *R.* 'Devoniensis', with its full, creamy flowers, which was raised near Plymouth in 1858. Both of these are climbers (although 'Lady Hillingdon' is also available in bush form). *R.* 'Devoniensis' is a strong grower with me. He is also a good cut flower with a lovely scent, especially when he warms up. Another climber I have had success with is *R.* 'Mrs Herbert Stevens' (1922). She is chalk-white with the lovely high-centred flowers of a true aristocrat. She glories in one mass blooming, then produces odd flowers through the rest of the season.

Among my most successful shrub rose varieties is *Rosa* 'Madame Antoine Mari' (1901). Recommended by the great Graham Stuart Thomas, I thought she may be a good buy - and so she was. A lovely soft pink with beautiful rolled edges to the petals. At times she has a scent, and at others not; it seems to depend on



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R. 'Devoniensis'



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R. 'Lady Hillingdon'



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R. 'Mrs Herbert Stevens'



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R. Mme. Antoine Mari

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R. 'Madame Berkeley'



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R. 'Archiduc Joseph'

the temperature and the time of day. Another beauty is R. 'Madame Berkeley' (1899), which I grow in a half barrel and which seems to flourish on regular feeding. She is a full-flowered pinky cream, again with rolled edges to the petals. R. 'Archiduc Joseph' (1892) also occupies a half barrel and is a most unusual colour, its fully double blooms being a mixture of crushed raspberry, salmon and bronze. Although this doesn't sound attractive, believe me - it is, and it's repeat flowering to boot.

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R. 'Maréchal Niel'

I no longer buy grafted roses, and now only source plants grown on their own rootstock. Some of the grafted varieties I bought in the past simply turned up their toes and died, so I'd like to try growing them again but this time on their own roots. I buy non-grafted plants from La Roseraie du Désert in France; it is no more costly than buying in the UK and they arrive with a good, fibrous root system, all ready to go. My aforementioned disasters, both grafted, include the shrub rose, R. 'William R. Smith', which never thrived and eventually gave up altogether, and R. 'Maréchal Niel' (1864) - the most beautiful rose ever bred, in my opinion - which succumbed to virus.

This year I have ordered another R. 'Maréchal Niel', non-grafted this time. It is difficult to get stock that is not affected by virus, but Becky and John Hook at La Roseraie du Désert have sourced a plant from Spain, which I hope will be clear. This climber also displays the classic rolled petals of the tea rose, with flowers of the most gorgeous soft yellow and a wonderful, 'kid-glove' texture. It needs a bit of shelter to bloom well, so I will be growing it up the front wall of my house, which faces almost due south. Here's hoping he does well.

The Hooks' nursery in France is a great find and they have been very helpful. [*Unfortunately, the nursery is now up for sale - Ed.*]. Why not give these roses a try? You may be surprised at how beautiful they are. Give them a warm spot and plenty of food, and away you (and they) go! They are the true aristocrats of the rose world.

La Roseaie du Désert is still trading at time of printing, at: www.frenchtearose.com

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