

## ROSA RUGOSA

*Andrew Haynes*

This useful group of roses, often dismissed as hedging roses, sometimes does not receive the respect it deserves. Very hardy, disease resistant, repeat flowering, tolerant of very poor soils and exposed sites, and with an exceptionally good 'old rose' scent, rugosas will also do well in richer soils and perform well in mixed borders.

The species *Rosa rugosa* was introduced to Britain from Japan in 1776 and is sometimes still known as the Japanese rose (not to be confused with *Rosa japonica*, which was bred in Europe). It is native to Northern China, Japan and Korea where it is a coastal plant, remarkably often growing on sand dunes; naturalised plants in the UK may be found in exactly this habitat, making it a perfect choice for coastal gardens or sandy soils.

The species has large single flowers (good for pollinators) 3½- 4" (9-10 cm) across, with a purplish rose colour and strong 'old rose' fragrance, forming a large and vigorous shrub up to 8ft (2.5m) in height, although on poor soils the plant will be considerably shorter. For a more manageable and shapely shrub, try pruning it to half its height when dormant buds begin to swell in spring, and perhaps dead-head severely to a couple of leaves below the spent flowers in summer. *Rosa rugosa* 'Alba' is a little shorter, at 6ft (1.8m), with pure white flowers. Seedling-raised plants of both will usually (but not always) come true, but are prone to suckering; this is the cheaper option for a hedge, but for other uses it is better to obtain grafted plants. Both will produce large, tomato-red hips.



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*Rosa rugosa*  
'Roseraie de L'Hay'



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Fringed *R.* 'Fimbriata'



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*Rosa rugosa* growing in sand dunes at Hengistbury Head in Dorset

The species is the one to choose for the most extreme conditions but hybrids with *rugosa* in their breeding will share many of these characteristics. For a more compact, naturally bushier plant with exceptional disease resistance, choose *R.* 'Frau Dagmar Hastrup' (syn. 'Frau Dagmar Hartopp'), at 4ft (1.2m) high, with rich pink buds opening to pale pink blooms, which repeat well, followed by dark red hips. Other double and semi-double forms include:

- *R.* 'Blanc Double de Coubert', which has large, semi-double, strongly fragrant white flowers that repeat well over a long season; 5ft (1.5m) high.
- *R.* 'Roseraie de L'Hay' has large, fully double, crimson/purple fragrant flowers. It is vigorous and repeating, but large at 8ft (2.5m).
- *R.* 'Hansa' is very similar, strongly fragrant, but shorter at 4ft (1.2m).
- *R.* 'Mrs Doreen Pike' was bred by David Austin, who is never quite sure whether to include it with rugosas or English roses. I include it here because it certainly has some rugosa characteristics, being tough, tolerant of poor conditions, and disease resistant. Small, fully-double, mid-pink, strongly fragrant flowers and 4ft (1.2m) high.

The above are the toughest and best repeat-flowerers in the group but others worth considering are:

- *R.* 'Agnes': double yellow, 7ft (2m) high.
- *R.* 'Sarah Van Fleet': clear pink, semi-double flowers, 7ft (2m).
- *R.* 'Scabrosa': large, violet-crimson, single flowers, slight fragrance and huge hips, 5ft (1.5m).
- *R.* 'Schneezwerg': small, semi-double white, 5ft (1.5m).
- *R.* 'Fimbriata': small, semi-double, soft pink flowers with fringed petals of intriguing form (resembling *Dianthus*) 4ft (1.2m).
- *R.* 'F. G. Grootendorst': small, double, crimson flowers with fringed petals and a bushy habit, 4ft (1.2m). Also similar, aside from the colour, are *R.* 'Pink Grootendorst' and *R.* 'White Grootendorst'.

You may not be gardening on a sand dune, but with this range of colour, size and form and some of the best scents of any roses, there should be something to suit almost every garden. Whether in a mixed border (at the back, for larger forms), as a specimen, or indeed as a hedge, they may well thrive where roses may not have seemed an option.