



The Legend of the Rose

by Jeanmarie Stephenson, UC Master Gardener

On September 17, 2014, the Tulare/Kings Master Gardeners placed a plaque at the Ralph Moore Rose Garden in Visalia, honoring the late Master Gardener Norman Phillips, for his dedication in caring for the garden and in helping new Master Gardeners and the public learn about the care of roses. He was a graduate of our first class of local Master Gardeners in 1996, and he remained active in the program until he passed away in December, 2013.

I recall a time when Norm taught me how to propagate roses. I had an old rose that I had been unable to find for purchase. This rose would bloom with as little as three hours of direct sun, which made it perfect for my shady Central Valley garden. Norm suggested that I choose a stem about the size of a pencil from this rose, and take a cutting just below a bud eye with two or three leaves on it. He then instructed me to put the cutting in a pot of moist soil, and keep it in indirect sunlight. Finally, he told me, water on a consistent basis and it should root in 3 to 6 weeks. Or, if you are daring, put the cutting directly into the garden soil. I followed his directions, and now that beautiful rose is growing in my yard.



Norm Phillips leading a rose pruning demonstration

Please remember: You may propagate patented roses for use in your garden only.

I remembered a magazine I had once read, called Roses and Romantic Garden Flowers (Harris Publications 2002), that had published an article titled: “The Legend of the Rose.” The following passage, which reminds me of Norm, is an excerpt from this article:

“Roses mark our passages through life. They help us celebrate events, symbolize our emotions, and speak our hearts. They have many personalities and moods. They can be small or tall, climb trees, form hedges, and cover an arbor, fence, or trellis with their beauty and fragrance. Roses mix with perennials or annuals with equal ease to form our gardens whether formal or informal. They delight our senses and are up to any landscape challenge.”

Roses have been part of our gardening experience for the many centuries that we have lovingly tended or even neglected them. There are stories and legends about roses that go back for hundreds of years.

The evidence of the oldest Native American garden rose is reported to have been found in the Florissant Fossil Beds near Cripple Creek, Colorado. Rose imprints on slate deposits there date the North American rose to 40 million years ago, making it the oldest plant still found in American gardens.

According to legend, the Romans used roses for many things, such as eating and bathing in them. They even stuffed their mattresses with rose petals. Roses, and coins imprinted with roses, have been used as currency. A valuable early American coin called the Rosa Americana was minted in 1722.

It was believed that roses had magical powers. The essential oil of *Rosa centifolia*, French cabbage rose, was believed to have aphrodisiac qualities. Roses were considered official medicine well into the 20th century, and used in one third of all remedies, from depression to infertility.

Up until the 1930's, pharmacies stocked tinctures of apothecary's rose (*Rosa gallica*) for relieving sore throats.

Currently, many Chinese physicians use rose petals as a stimulant and blood tonic. Rose oil, one of the major oils used in aromatherapy, contains 300 chemical constituents, of which only about 100 have been identified so far.

The history of roses at the White House began with John Adams, who planted a combination vegetable and rose garden. Thomas Jefferson and George Washington also loved roses. Washington grew a hybrid rose from a seed, which he named: "Mary Washington."

The rose is our National Flower, designated in 1986 by President Reagan, acting on a joint resolution of both the Senate and House of the 99th Congress. The Joint Resolution states: "Whereas there has long represented love, friendship, peace and the devotion of the American people to their country....that the flower commonly known as the rose is designated and adopted as the national floral emblem of the United States."

Norm Phillips will always be remembered in our rose garden. This places him in the company of a flower that is as significant to gardening culture as he was to the Master Gardener Program.



Norm Phillips and Ann Belau at a rose pruning demonstration

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