



Low Water Roses for Use in Home Gardens

by Dorothy Downing, UC Master Gardener

If you think about it, roses are sustainable. In California, they have been planted in and around cemeteries where they have been surviving for years and years. In both Northern and Southern California, many of the large estates are surrounded by roses, watered mostly by rain. Lack of precipitation may reduce the number and size of the flowers that the rose produces, but it probably won't kill the plant.

Author and rose specialist Peter Kukielski, the former curator of the New York Botanical Garden's rose garden, says "the key is to choose roses that work in your environment." Some rose varieties tolerate drought better than others. Unless you need or desire rose blossoms with a higher petal count and a longer vase life, seek out more drought-resistant varieties. Those types include China roses, Rugosas, and Knock Out roses, all of which have received the designation as Earth-Kind Roses.

One of the most drought tolerant varieties is the China rose, also known as the butterfly rose (*Rosa chinensis* 'Mutabilis'). The new leaves are coppery-plum and change to green and the shrub is covered with color-changing flowers. They open up yellow in the morning, change to pale pink in the afternoon and, by the time evening arrives, they assume a color somewhere between deep rose-pink and magenta. Shades of yellow, pink and scarlet sweep over the shrub at the same time as its many butterfly shaped blooms mature at differing rates. It offers a parade of colors for months of beauty. A whimsical hybrid, 'Mutabilis' is a sight to behold and a simple pleasure to grow. It is a shrub rose that can reach 6 to 8 feet tall and can be trimmed into a blooming hedge. This rose is a part of the collection of All-Star Water Wise plants at the UC Davis Arboretum and can be purchased at other nurseries in the state.

What makes China roses special among drought-tolerant roses is they are early bloomers and they possess an amazing re-blooming capacity with a mild fragrance. Many China rose cultivars flower on and off throughout the year in mild climates such as ours. In comparison, several other species of roses, while equally drought tolerant, have a single annual bloom period.

The most familiar one-time annual bloomer is Lady Banks, a vine or climbing rose that actually grows wild in places. It is a most wonderful sight to see in late winter or early spring when few, if any, woody perennials are in bloom. Its elongated shoots are covered end to end in small yellow roses. On occasion, a white Lady Banks cultivar is also seen. The growth of Lady Banks roses is explosive and you will have to prune it hard regularly to keep it in bounds. Their drought tolerance and vigor have made them very desirable to plant along freeways. The rose needs regular water until it is established, then it doesn't require a lot of extra irrigation except in severe heat or drought. In fact, the largest rose in the world is a 100-year-old Lady Banks in Tombstone, Arizona.



Another drought tolerant variety of rose, Rugosas, makes a very healthy, winter hardy, and sturdy shrub. They have so many wonderful attributes that they should be included in every garden. Almost all Rugosas and hybrid Rugosas varieties are extremely fragrant with few exceptions. They are generally identified by their foliage, which is usually bright green and heavily textured with deep veining. Their elegance makes them look like they're all dressed up for company. The flowers vary from single to double and most varieties are rather informal in shape. Most Rugosas produce large, decorative hips that attract and feed birds in the fall and winter. They are native to the coasts of Japan and Korea and are very tolerant of salt air. They are easy to grow, very drought tolerant, and do well in poor conditions. They are extremely disease resistant (virtually immune to blackspot and mildew). Rugosas do not like to be sprayed with chemicals nor do they need them; therefore, they will fit perfectly into an organic garden. Their decorative hips are a wonderful source of vitamin C and since they would not be sprayed, they can be used for many culinary purposes. Most varieties are hardy through zones 3 – 9.

Drought tolerant roses were designated by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service through the Earth-Kind® landscaping program. The slogan of Earth-Kind roses is: "Beauty that is tough to beat". In order to be deemed an Earth-Kind rose, it must demonstrate superior pest resistance, be drought tolerant, and require less fertilization and pesticide, as well as provide outstanding performance in the landscape. These roses do well in both acidic and alkaline soils and have excellent heat and drought tolerance.

A few varieties of the Earth-Kind roses include "Knock Out", "Carefree Beauty", "Perle D'Or" and a favorite climbing rose, "Cecile Brunner". The previously mentioned Mutabilis is also designated as an Earth –Kind rose. The Knockout Rose was developed in 2000 and quickly became a favorite with both home gardeners and landscapers because of its drought tolerance, pest resistance and non-stop semi-double blooms.

Where can the UCCE Master Gardeners be found this month?

- Tulare Garden Festival: Sat., April 1, 10 am - 2 pm. Tulare City Library, 475 N. "M" St., Tulare
- City of Visalia Earth Day: Sat., April 22. Mineral King Ave., downtown Visalia
- Visit us at the Visalia Farmers Market at the Sear's Parking lot on Mooney on each Saturday. On the 2nd Saturday of the month, we will be presenting ongoing talks: April 8 - Herbs; May 12 - Citrus.

We love to talk plants. Come ask us your gardening questions!

April 8, 2017