

August 14, 2019



Bob and the Duchess: A Tale of Antique Roses
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The “Bob” Rose my family calls him: a beautiful branching bramble searching to top a neighboring 60-foot tree and touching earth to set roots for progeny, blooming once but profusely in bright pink open-cup single flowers which are strongly scented. This antique rose is the Sweetbriar or Eglantine rose (*Rosa-rubiginosa*), named in Shakespeare as the epitome of perfumed, lush, Midsummer Night’s Dream fairyland roses. The Sweetbriar rose was originally a wild native of Europe and now happily graces abandoned Mother Lode fences, cemeteries and fields. Husband Bob was this rose’s sole admirer due to a heavy armament of not only curved and hooked thorns (“cat’s-claw prickles” to a rosarian), but also small bristles and stiff glandular hairs. The hairs give foliage additional aroma in wet weather. The Sweetbriar rose must have enough space to spread but can be tamed by post-bloom pruning of the branch tips; pruning the rose by removing ground-level trunks will kill those trunks and young branches completely. Deep green leaves in summer and bright red hips in fall give the Sweetbriar rose year-round appeal. Ours has thrived with little water, no fertilizer, and no rose diseases like black spot or rust. Mulch around the dripline, leaving a space of bare earth around the trunk. Deer will nibble only the new growth of this rose, preferring instead my hybrid teas. One can propagate the Sweetbriar rose easily by pulling a long branch, while still attached to the father rose, down to the soil, fastening it with a garden staple or pinning it beneath a rock. The “node” opposite the dried and spent flower on each branch will eagerly root and become a vigorous “Bob” of your own.

“The Duchess” is my backyard favorite, much more a traditional and gentle (read “normal thorns”) rose. Properly she is the Duchesse-du-Brabant rose (*Rosa chinensis 'Duchesse de*

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Brabant'), a Hermosa rose from the family of China roses first cultivated in 1840. The Duchesse-du-Brabant is an elegant upright and prolific bloomer from spring through November (rosarians say “blooms in flushes”) with delicate pale pink nodding multi-petalled flowers. The lower and leafless trunks and branches may need 1/2 latex/1/2 water “paint” (as you would use for a fruit tree) to protect her from sunburn. Growing as a tall, shrubby rose, she is water-thrifty and also resistant to rose diseases. The Duchess is likely to graciously yield space to surrounding and vigorous summer-growing plants like butterfly bush or viburnum and so, she may become leggy. You will want to plant her where there is no competition for sunlight. (As with all roses, she wants full sun.) Prune by deadheading back to a five-leafed branchlet as the season progresses, and the Duchess will reward you with repeat bloom. Heavy pruning during dormancy (as for a hybrid tea) is not recommended.

Intrigued? Both these roses and hundreds more are available from specialty nurseries look for two-gallon own-root choices. Or, for total immersion in an enthusiastic “rosy circle,” go visit the Historic Rose Garden in Sacramento’s Old City Cemetery at 1000 Broadway in Sacramento. Almost all of the Garden’s 500 antique and hybrid tea roses are in bloom for the annual Open Garden Day in April. And you will meet the “rosy circle” of Garden volunteers and Master Gardeners whose mission is to preserve and share the delights of antique roses. Amador County is constructing a Heritage rose garden which will be open in the Fall of 2019. For more information go to <http://ucanr.edu/amador-heritage-rose-garden>.

Source: The Random House Guide to Roses

Roger Phillips and Martyn Rix
Random House, New York, 1988

On Saturday, August 17, from 9:00 to 12:00, join the El Dorado County Master Gardeners to hear a talk by Zack Dowell on growing a successful winter vegetable garden. The class will be held at Government Center Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court, Placerville.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512), or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.