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Shrub

A showy alternative

By Marge Alpern
special writer

THE ROSE world has been compared to the least desirable aspect of the American automobile world.

By putting its efforts into continuously producing new models and new styles to attract a fickle public, rather than researching and producing a quality, long lasting, undemanding variety, the rose industry has lost its time honored place in the rapidly expanding home gardening market.

Modern roses, like many modern appliances and automobiles, seem to be made not to last. They quickly succumb to the cold or are so weakened by over-treatment of lack of necessary treatment that they die of early senility. More varieties seem to be the result of a pursuit of novelty for its own sake.

Every conceivable crossing has been made of hybrid teas, grandifloras and floribunda, all in search of bigger, flashier flowers at the expense of other virtuous qualities. Some of the newer varieties have flowers that are so huge and so heavy that their weak stems cannot even support them. Too often, sturdiness and long life of plant has been sacrificed for cabbage-like flowers.

Many true rose lovers don't mind the frailties and are even willing to accept the short life of the modern tea roses. They often treat the rose as expensive annuals and replace the plants frequently. Some gardeners don't mind the demanding program of careful watering, regular fertilizing, constant treatment for insect and disease control, pruning and mulching, and early death, and give the delicate roses all that they require.

BUT FOR THE most part, America has had it with growing roses. Partly this is due to the difficulties of growing them, which breeders have done little to alleviate. Commercial growers don't seem to realize that today most gardeners don't have the time to maintain a constant, elaborate program of spraying and fertilizing.

It seems that there are about 18 different things that can go wrong with roses and some of them simultaneously. These problems range from aphids to beetles to black spot and on and on. The names of the remedies are endless, and they all sound like unpleasant cures. The environmentally sensitive gardener doesn't want to use any of these harsh chemicals whether they have the time or not. That kind of gar-

dening is not acceptable in the 1980's.

Although there is always news of a better spray for black spot and a well financed promotion program by the chemical companies, most gardeners would prefer a rose with inbred resistance to the disease instead and would willingly accept smaller or fewer flowers, if that were necessary.

Even the legendary hybrid tea rose, Peace, beautiful as it is, is susceptible to every rose plague. Like many other modern roses, it was bred primarily for appearance of blooms and nothing else.

CONSEQUENTLY, THE published statistics show that rose growing in this country actually has severely declined. The Wayside Garden catalog of 1960 devoted 30 pages to roses. In 1981 there were 10 pages. Conard-Pyle one of the largest wholesale rose growers admits that their sales are down 40 percent over the last 10 years.

Though many gardeners are finding the hybrid tea rose too demanding, too expensive and not worth the space in their small suburban garden, it doesn't mean one need not grow any type of rose.

Shrub roses are the answer being offered by the industry recognition of the declining market. Conard-Pyle is leading the industry in developing and distributing a large variety of shrub roses.

DEBORAH SILVER, the rose expert at Goldner-Walsh Nursery in Pontiac, gave me a great deal of information regarding the increase in development of shrub roses and their advantages over the hybrid teas. Silver, who got her degree in biology, grew up with gardening as a major part of her life. She worked at Hughes Perennial Gardens before coming to Goldner-Walsh.

Because she is a serious and fine painter as well as a botanist, she brings a highly developed aesthetic sense to her gardening. In discussing shrub roses, she said that she feels that they introduce a "much needed softness and grace to the typical American suburban garden." "Shrub roses," she continued, "can be used in place of a forsythia or a spirea bush. The flowers last just as long, and the shrub will live just as long as any other flowering shrub and offer an attractive year round appearance. The color of the stalks of some of the varieties, the colorful fall foliage, and the bright red, persistent seed hips are a bonus we never have seen in hybrid roses, which actually are quite unattractive after

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