

A Brief History of the Rose

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The rose is one of the oldest flowers known to man and is still the most popular. It has been honored in legends, romance, and beauty as well as literature, art, and medicine. Today roses entice the novice gardener with their promise of beauty and being a special satisfaction to the accomplished rosarian.

The rose has been grown and appreciated for its fragrance and beauty since ancient times. They were grown to adorn palaces, for their perfume oil, to welcome guest by tossing petals in the waterways. Swimming pools and fountains were filled with rose water and even the petals were sat on during feasts and celebrations.

As early as 600 BC, Greek writers and a likeness on coins of Rhodes (about 325 BC) believe roses were admired and grown in gardens of these times. There is also evidence that indicated roses were cultivated by ancient people of China, western Asia and Northern Africa some 5,000 years ago. In Egypt in 300 BC there were images of roses displayed in the tombs. The popularity of the rose existed during the entire period of the Roman Empire.

The Chinese were probably the first to cultivate roses. Five hundred years before the birth of Christ, Confucius wrote of the roses in the Imperial Gardens. It would be centuries before the first true repeat-flowering roses from China would arrive in the West when, during the Middle Ages, the Crusaders brought them. The ancient Greek cultivated roses for the beauty of the flowers, for medicinal purposes, and as a perfume. During the Roman Empire the rose reached its peak in popularity and demand. The Romans used much of their acreage to grown roses rather than food crops, and even imported roses from Egypt. The Romans forced roses to bloom either in greenhouses or by warm water irrigation as they established their rose-growing industry.

The first fossil record of the rose dates back 3.5 billion years. The first written record of the rose was in 3000 BC in what is now known as Iraq. The first reference to the beauty of the rose as the queen of flowers, “Ode to the Rose,” was by the Greek poetess Sappho in 600 BC. In the 16th century colonists brought the rose to North America, making it the longest cultivated European plant in this country. In 1798 empress Josephine of France created the most remarkable rose garden ever planted and included every variety known at that time (about 250 BC). “Modern” roses hybrid teas date back to 1867 and by 1920 hybrid teas dominated the market and remain the most popular rose variety today. One of the most well known roses, “Peace,” was smuggled to America from occupied France in 1945.

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan proclaimed the rose as America’s National Flower. The American Rose Society designated 2002 as “The Year of the Rose,” with a yearlong celebration. The purpose of the campaign was to promote interest in establishing public rose gardens as well as individuals growing them in their backyards and to celebrate the rose as the symbol of love, friendship, beauty and peace. June has been designated national rose month with libraries across America being asked to display rose books and present rose programs.

The American Rose Society encourage members to honor our nation’s veterans by delivering rose blooms to patients in veteran hospitals, present programs, provide information for articles for the local press, and supply literature and give advice to the novice rose growers.

America's Flower