

## Earth –Kind Roses™

by Frank J. Van Lenten

The Earth-Kind™ Rose Program is a joint effort between the Texas Cooperative Extension and the Houston Rose Society to identify roses that almost anyone can grow as landscape shrubs, “with almost no care”(!) It addresses the need for the home gardener to avoid using complicated, regular spray routines to ward off fungal and insect diseases and high doses of fertilizer to produce “the perfect bloom” and the need for regular watering. This sounds too good to be true and maybe it is, if you have the need to produce “the perfect bloom” capable of winning a court prize at local and district rose shows.

There is some call for, however, roses which are at least easier to grow than what most of us struggle with every year, even as more than novice rosarians. The novice gardener, attempting to grow roses, **really** struggles with watering, chemical treatments, amending the soil, fertilizing, and the like. It probably is true that although many gardeners want to grow roses, many people have such a strong feeling that they are doomed to failure, that they don't even try. Proponents of the Earth-Kind™ Rose Program, feel that they can overcome this dilemma and help anyone grow respectable roses.

Roses in the program that receive the “Earth-Kind” designation are subjected to some rigorous testing performed by horticulturists at Texas A&M University and prove to give consistently high performance over climate and soil conditions all over the world. These roses have been graded as the best varieties requiring the least amount of care that can grow in the most varied regions of climate zones AND reduce the need for pesticides (fungicides, insecticides and miticides) by 95%. Over a 5 year study, 11 (out of over 500) cultivars showed great adaptability to perform well over harsh and diverse conditions including:

Alkaline clay soil pH 8-8, unimproved soil, no fertilization, no pesticides spraying, no watering after the first year, no pruning except removing dead wood. In another words they were pretty much stressed as we rosarians would define it! The only amenity given to these roses was a 4 inch layer of hardwood mulch throughout the test period and additional drip irrigation for the first year. All 11 species “thrived” after the first year, with the exception of smaller bloom size during a drought that summer.

The test was conducted in order to identify species capable of surviving in southern gardens but perform well in other locations. They all are resistant to blackspot and are grown on their own roots. It has been said semi-jokingly that “if you can grow weeds, you can grow these roses”. So without further suspense, here's the list (notice that we're conspicuously missing the “perfect formed” hybrid teas, grandifloras and floribundas-although the general public possibly forgives this omission). Four other super-roses have been added to stretch the list to 15 with the Earth-Kind™ designation:

Sea Foam-white shrub rose (zones 5-11)

Marie Daly-pink polyantha dwarf shrub (zones 5-9)

The Fairy-light pink polyantha dwarf shrub (zones 4-9)

Caldwell Pink- lilac pink shrub (zones 6-9)

Knock Out-cherry red semi-double shrub (zones 5-9)

Perle d'Or-peach polyantha (zones 6-9)  
Belinda's Dream-pink shrub (zones 5-9)  
Else Poulson-pink floribunda (zones 5-9)  
Carefree Beauty-pink Buck rose (zones 4-9)  
Mutabilis-changing color china rose (zones 7-11)  
Climbing Pinkie-pink polyantha (zones 6-9)  
Spice-pink china (zones 7-10)  
Duchesse de Brabant-pink tea rose (zones 7-9)  
Ducher- white china (zones 7-11)  
Georgetown Tea- dark pink shrub (zones 7-9)

More studies are going on to expand the list to include approx. 30 roses that can be grown anywhere in the US. Even if you don't find the "perfect HT form" on these roses, there is something good to be said for care-free landscape type roses that do not require much care. This should expand the number of home gardeners attempting to grow roses and therefore possibly revolutionize gardening at the extreme-just look at what KnockOut has done already!

(this summary liberally paraphrased from a larger article by Gaye Hammond –president of the Houston Rose Society)