

# How My Garden Grows

**WATERSHED MOMENT:** *A point in time when nothing after will ever be the same as before.*

My Watershed Moment occurred on the morning of my first visit to the Historic Old Sacramento City Cemetery.

We'd visited other old cemeteries, photographed, even collected and propagated forgotten roses in those places. We'd grown Old Roses before we ever planted moderns – but it was that first cool November morning in the Sacramento Cemetery's lovely Historic Rose Garden, surrounded by bloom and fragrance, that opened my eyes to the truth:

**The key to growing lovely roses without drudgery, and without chemicals is simply finding the right roses for the place you want to grow them.**

It's as simple as that. And as complex!



*'Archduke Charles  
Historic Rose Garden  
Old Sacramento  
City Cemetery  
1000 Broadway, Sacramento, CA*



The trick is learning WHICH roses are the right roses for your garden. I'd like to say that we found the right advisors, and made the best selections to begin with. I'd LIKE to say that, but it would be a lie.

The truth is, when we started, Bob Edberg of Limberlost Roses tried to tell us that we couldn't grow Gallicas in our coastal garden. He urged us to grow Tea Roses, China Roses, and Noisette Roses. He advised against most of the Northern European roses for our coastal location, pointing out that those roses required a period of dormancy we could not provide. Did we listen? Nope. We'd read the wonderful English books which rhapsodized over Mosses, Albas, Centifolias, and Gallicas, and we were on fire to grow them ourselves. We sought out those roses and treated them with loving care.

To our chagrin, the European beauties grew indifferently here. They bloomed sparingly, suffered from fungal diseases even when sprayed, and eventually began to fail. I don't regret that failed experiment. We learned from those failures. We even won a Dowager Queen or three, or four, along the way – but they were only a way-station on the road to enlightenment

It did not escape our notice that, while the Gallicas and Centifolias faltered, the few Tea Roses we'd planted here flourished. Gradually, the focus of our garden changed. We explored the grace of Teas, the ebullience of China Roses, and the lyricism of the whole range of Noisettes both bush and climbing of habit. Those



*“Bengal Fire”*



*“Benny Lopez”*

*Double quote marks on rose names indicate a “Study Name” applied to a Found or Unidentified Rose. SINGLE quote marks indicate a formally-accepted “Exhibition” name, assigned or acknowledged by the American Rose Society.*

roses didn’t require chill hours we couldn’t give them, and they were astonishingly tolerant of alkaline conditions that had turned the foliage of some roses pure white. These are the roses of Asian descent – evolved with no need for winter chill, and seemingly designed for our conditions.

They grew, and they bloomed, and when garden chemicals triggered seizures in our dog, they succeeded without chemicals, and flourished on a diet of horse manure and alfalfa tea.

We learned by doing. The roses that love our garden, with no winter dormancy do not require annual cold-season pruning. (That eliminated one nasty chore!) Instead, they benefit from regular “*bend-and-snap*” dead-heading through the year. Since this can be accomplished on a warm summer evening with a chilled glass of wine in one hand, the whole activity becomes more appealing.

The Sacramento Old City Cemetery provided the final key:

**Roses that can survive on their own through decades of neglect and drought will likewise flourish in a home garden with even minimal care and water.**

The Cemetery’s collection of “*Historic Roses*” is for the most part made up of roses gathered through the



*‘Bloomfield Courage’*

*Rescued Rose, San Juan Bautista State Historic Park*



*‘Le Pactole’*

*Rescued, Sierra Foothills, by Fred Boutin*



**“Setzer Noisette”**  
A “Family” Rose, of The ‘Blush Noisette’ Group

**“Grandmother’s Hat”**  
Quintessentially Californian

years in old gardens and un-maintained cemeteries, by people bent on preservation. Having survived nicely with NO care, and little water, they delight the eye once given regular gentle care and weekly watering. With water, many of them bloom right through the year, though it is true that warm weather and dry conditions trigger their half-hearted attempt at dormancy. Most of them have bloomed joyously right through our few really cold winter periods.

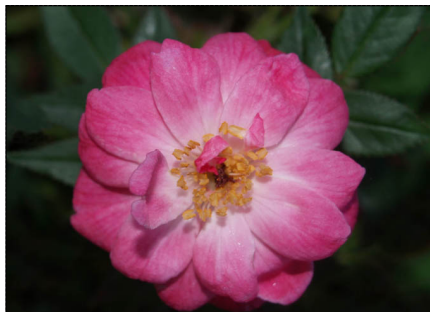
We have learned to be ruthless.

No matter how attractive we find its blooms, a rose that rusts or mildews consistently doesn’t remain in our garden. Roses should make you happy. Rusty, mildew hulks do not fill that requirement. If they don’t develop resistance to those problems, we don’t keep them. (Blackspot is a rare visitor to our area, so the occasional outbreak of that disease doesn’t trouble us. It disappears in time, without intervention.)

Without annual pruning and damaging cold weather, our roses grow large. After a few decades of growth, it became clear to us that we had planted too many roses in too little space. As water has become more expensive, we’re removing excess roses to allot more space to those we keep. And we are removing roses that are in wide commerce, to enable the retention of real rarities and un-named Found Roses.

‘*Mme. Isaac Pereire*’ was un-successful here, but Cass Bernstein’s Foundling, tough, beautiful “*Old Town Novato*,” fills that niche admirably, without the rust and mildew that troubled the Madame in our climate.

‘*Catherine Mermet*’ mildews in our climate, and so does ‘*Duchesse de Brabant*.’ (Even “*Earthkind*” roses can struggle in our conditions.) A clone of ‘*Devoniensis*’ collected in an old Northern California cemetery takes the place of the former. The latter is eclipsed by a vigorous, disease-free ‘*Lady Roberts*.’ Every shade of pink, from pale to deep cerise is provided here by “*Grandmother’s Hat*,” “*Benny Lopez*,” “*De la Vina Mystery*,”



**“Legacy of Frank Dorroh”**  
(Dwarf China? Sierra Foothills)



**The Late Col. Mel Hulse, and “La Dama Blanca”**  
(Probably ‘Gloire Lyonnaise’)



*'Rosette Delizy' — A Tea Rose*



**"New Orleans Cemetery Rose"**  
Found, New Orleans, LA  
By Maureen Detweiler



*'Louis Philippe'*  
A China Rose

*'Tina Marie,'* and many more.

*'General Jacqueminot'* and its latter-day red, fragrant Hybrid Tea descendants rusted and mildewed for us, even when sprayed religiously. *'Gloire des Rosomanes,'* ("*Ragged Robin*") – grown from very old rootstock survivors, blooms joyously through the year, in masses of flaming red, clothed with perfect foliage from start to finish. If that's not enough red, we can enjoy *'White Pearl In Red Dragon's Mouth,'* *'Bengal Red'* ("*Bengal Fire*"), *'Louis Phillippe,'* "*Elisabeth's China,*" and "*Magnolia Cemetery Rose.*" All China Roses, almost never without bloom here.

Our best roses may not be yours.



**"Secret Garden Musk Climber"**  
A Continuous-Blooming, Fragrant Climbing Rose, Found in The Sierra Foothills, by Joyce Demits



***'Le Pactole'***

*A Vigorous, Continuous-Blooming, Lemon-White Tea Rose, Introduced in France Pre 1837  
Thought Extinct, 'Le Pactole' was recovered in the Sierra Foothills by Fred Boutin, and Returned To Commerce  
From The Historic Rose Garden in The Historic Old Sacramento City Cemetery*

Where Teas, Noisettes, and Chinas favor the warmer-climate areas, your garden may offer the perfect conditions for the Northern Europeans we can't grow here. The right roses for your conditions will require the least work, and possess the best resistance to the diseases that trouble roses in your climate and conditions. To learn which they are, talk to rosarians in your area. But I urge you to look further.



***'Tina Marie'***

*A Registered White Sport  
Of A "Found" Rose  
("Grandmother's Hat")  
Can Bloom Blush In Cool Conditions*



*'Red Radiance'*



*'Reve d'Or'*



*'Mme. Berkeley'*

As I visited the Sacramento Cemetery – and as I return to that garden often – I continue to look for roses that make me smile. Visit public gardens in your area that include Old Roses and Shrub Roses. Ask whether or not their roses are sprayed. Observe the roses repeatedly, to learn what succeeds, and what fails in conditions like your own, and plant accordingly. If a rose can't stand your winter cold, or your summer heat, or dies of the diseases common in your conditions, it offers you nothing but frustration. When you make mistakes, cull ruthlessly, and try again for roses that are easy to grow. Be open to roses of all types, and your garden will become a center of originality as well as beauty.

Roses should bring us joy, and the right rose in the right garden can make the heart sing.

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*The Historic Old Sacramento  
City Cemetery  
is located at  
1000 Broadway, Sacramento, CA*

*For a Virtual Visit to the  
Historic Rose Garden,  
go to:  
<http://www.cemeteryrose.org/>*

Photo Left:  
R. banksia lutea  
Sacramento City Cemetery  
Historic Rose Garden

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