**Dunn Formal Rose Garden**

Arguably the most widely-recognized flower, the beauty and diversity of modern roses is celebrated in the Dunn Formal Rose Garden, given in memory of William R. J. Dunn, Jr., who first envisioned a botanical garden in Birmingham. Originally designed in 1963, and updated by Robert Kirk in 1988, this beautiful and popular feature is laid out in a classic cross-axial style, with strong formal (mirror-image) symmetry. Elegant structures provide architectural counterpoints: a columned cypress pergola, dedicated to Beverley Dunn, offers a shady respite. At either end, large urns (see our Sculpture Guide for more information on sculptures), given in honor of Jeanne Cunningham, bellow with seasonal offerings. The garden is in bloom from April until frost, with a spring peak around mid-May and a fall peak in mid-October. The collection consists of up to 115 varieties of hybrid roses.

**A New Era**

Jean-Baptiste Guillot, gardener to Emperor Napoleon and Empress Josephine of France, is credited with creating the first modern rose in 1867. He used so-called “hybrid perpetuals,” which were weakly re-blooming, and tea roses from China in his breeding, and named his initial creation—the first hybrid tea rose—‘La France.’ Along with the huge size and rich fragrance of its flowers, it boasted a first in the world of roses: a heavy, reliable and dramatic season-long flowering cycle. From this esteemed beginning the modern rose era began; since then countless hybrid teas, floribundas, grandifloras, polyanthas, climbers, miniatures and, more recently, shrub roses, have been bred.

**Roses in Commerce**

Growing roses is big business in the landscape and cut flower trades. The introduction of a new rose results from years of research, breeding, and field evaluations, and represents a substantial investment in money and time. Such a venture promises financial reward and merits legal protection. The first plant patent in the United States was issued for a rose, the cultivar known as ‘New Dawn,’ in 1931. Today, new rose varieties are backed by massive marketing campaigns, conspicuous packaging and, often, celebrity names to accompany their patents. Commercial production of roses is concentrated in the U.S.A., as well as France, Holland, Israel, Mexico and Colombia.
As popular as they are, roses are not the easiest plants for average gardeners to grow. So-called shrub and landscape types are notable exceptions, but most hybrid roses are demanding, requiring full sun, consistent moisture, good drainage, timely and proper pruning (encourages re-blooming), and regular treatment for pests. In our moist, humid climate, roses are especially prone to fungal infections, and leaf and root diseases; for healthy plants, repeat chemical applications are almost a certainty.

Hybrid Teas:
These generally bear one flower per stem and are particularly beautiful in bud, with a long pointed form that opens delicately into a delightful double flower with a high central cone. The color range is the most complete among roses; there are even “blue” (actually, lilac or lavender) flowers. Although large and fragrant, they are not as vigorous as some other varieties.

Polyanthas:
Generally low-growing, bushy plants, averaging 18 to 24 inches in height, they have small leaves and dense clusters of small flowers on short stems. Generally, they have a more limited range of colors, but they are very hardy, disease-resistant, and bloom profusely. The petals are usually of the same color on a flower and in some cases the flowers may be semi-double. They bloom early, in spring, and their flowers are not as fragrant as some others.

Floribundas:
Floribundas are quite variable in height, ranging from 18 inches to three and a half feet. They generally form more compact, denser growth, and are usually less vigorous than hybrid teas, requiring less pruning. Floribundas are among the latest roses to bloom in spring, continuing to flower until frost. They generally bloom in clusters and have a wide range of colors and fragrances. Some floribundas are not generally known for their fragrance, but there are several highly perfumed varieties.

Grandifloras:
These are tall-growing roses, often reaching five feet or more in height, even in harsh climates. They are sturdy, with a strong, upright growth habit, and are generally more vigorous than floribundas. Grandifloras generally bloom continually over the flowering season rather than in bursts. They are more versatile than floribundas and can be trained as hedges, screens, or espaliers. They can be very fragrant, and their flowers range in size and color, with some having double or even triple petals.

Minatures:
Since miniature roses are available in so many different forms, defining them is difficult. Even their height is variable, ranging from 8 to 36 inches. Most are well-branched and bushy, with small, usually double flowers. They are usually fragrant and easy to grow, with a wide range of colors. They are well suited to containers and are popular for bedding in formal gardens.

Old Garden Roses:
Old Garden Roses are the predecessors of today’s roses. Some date back to the time of the Roman Empire when they were grown in the gardens of the wealthy. Although they are not as fragrant as some other varieties, they are hardy, disease-resistant, and winter-hardy, with many providing fragrance for the garden and home. Old garden roses were popularized by the French and are still popular today.

Growing Roses
The Dunn Formal Rose Garden is an official All-America Rose Selection Display Garden; new introductions are displayed every year and it perennially wins AARS maintenance awards. To learn more about roses, visit The Library at Birmingham Botanical Gardens. Get involved with the Birmingham Chapter of the American Rose Society whose members actively tend this garden; call our Volunteer Office at 205.414.3962.

Note: This garden is closed to visitors once a week for maintenance, usually Tuesday.

However, shrub and landscape roses are markedly different than their kin. These user-friendly roses were popularized (and breeding efforts were concentrated) because beginner and average gardeners, and landscape designers demanded easy care, reliable performance and pest-tolerance along with their flowers. These adaptable roses grow in a dense, shrub-like fashion, and although their individual flowers are smaller, most are stunning in bloom, repeat well, and offer some fragrance; a few have attractive fruit, called hips. Chemical applications are seldom necessary for health and vigor.