

If there
could only be
one flower,
it would have
to be

THE
ROSE

by Maxine Paetro



A "war of roses" vignette guards the entrance to a secret woodland garden. Photo by Jennifer May.

When I saw an old, run-down Cape Cod on a bull-dozed lot, I made my decision without ever seeing the inside. The little acre-and-a-half parcel faced south and was bathed in sun all day long, and that meant -- I could have roses.

I ran through the house with my eyes closed so nothing would disturb my rosy vision. I signed papers and before the sale was closed, I began to plan the garden.

My friend and horticulturist, Tim Steinhoff, gave me a large, full-color book, Peter Beales's *Classic Roses*, a rose encyclopedia like no other. I turned the pages with post-it notes in hand, filling the book with little yellow stickies, flooding my mind with images of fragrant old shrub roses—damasks, chinas, bourbons, gallicas, hybrid musks and teas, moss and crested roses, rugosas, grandifloras, and floribundas.

Here's an understatement: I was naïve about the amount of work roses require. Of course, sunshine is key to their success, but it's not everything!

The future rose border was an ambitious undertaking – a three-hundred-foot-long by fifteen-foot-wide strip running between my new driveway and the neighbor's lusty hayfield. The ground had to be tilled and weeded, and weeded and weeded. The clay soil was amended. Thorny sticks were planted and watered in, and then came the hard part.

The roses had to be fertilized, sprayed, pruned, weeded, and mulched with five inches of sweet peat every year. This was no one-person job. I hired gardeners and became a pretty fair gardener myself. Some summer eves, while holding dripping oscillators and dragging hundreds of feet of garden hose up and down the drive, I had to wonder if all this work was worth a few blooming weeks in June.

Today, twenty-four years after the first shrub rose was planted, it's one of those rare bloomin' days in June.

The rose bushes are large, healthy shrubs, gravid with buds, underplanted with silver foliage and purple-flowering herbs. Most of my original shrubs are weighed down with roses in many shades of pink and burgundy and white: cupped blooms, singles, semi-doubles, buttoned and quartered roses with wonderful names—Sarah van Fleet, Madame Hardy, Stanwell Perpetual, Blanc Double de Coubert, Tour de Malakoff, Jacques Cartier, Beales's cover girl, Fantin Latour, and my favorite, a pale pink tutu of a rose, Celsiana.

Other roses, just as sweet, came after the originals: Agnes, a pale yellow rugosa, who blooms first; Nevada and Golden Wings, simple

and elegant; Therese Bugnet, Hebe's Lip, and Carefree Beauty, who blooms in December. Other relative newcomers include rambling Explorer roses and some of David Austin's new English varieties. I even planted cuttings from beach roses that had been growing around the Nantucket cottage where my husband and I honeymooned.

Here is one of my most treasured vignettes: William Baffin, a hardy Canadian climber with a semi-double, dark-pink flower, spreading twelve feet in all directions, flanks one side of a rustic gate. Across from Mr. Baffin stands a ubiquitous invader from another continent, the wild multiflora rose. It's a pest to farmers and an egalitarian sweetener of country roads with its trusses of aromatic white blossoms. Mine caresses an English chimney pot from Hampton Court, then climbs thirty feet into the branches of a locust tree.

These two roses guard the entrance to the secret woodland garden at the bottom of my driveway: the red rose and the white, Lancaster and York, who meet a Victorian artifact in an American, English-style country garden. What a lovely, bloodless war of roses.

Peter Beales's *Classic Roses* and information on hundreds of rose varieties can be viewed at www.classicroses.com.uk. To buy actual roses, check out your local nursery and *Roses of Yesterday and Today*, online, www.rosesofyesterday.com.

Now, it's dusk. Frogs peep. Tabby cats chase fireflies through the border. My dear husband puts his hand on my shoulder and says, "Time to stop and smell the roses."



Photo by Jennifer May

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Photographer Jennifer May's photographs have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Gourmet*, *People*, and many other publications. See more of her work at jennifermay.com.

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