

GROUND COVER ROSES

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Roses reached the peak of their popularity in the U.K. during the 1960's. The level of imports of rose rootstocks (Table 1) illustrates this fact reasonably accurately, but from 1974 we must also take into account the amount of home-produced stocks. This home production was made possible following work carried out by Dr. Blundell at Bangor University and was industry funded through the Rose Growers Association. An investment by the industry of one or two thousand pounds is now saving half a million annually.

The popularity of the rose declined during the 70's for a number of reasons, the most significant being (a), the need to spray regularly against mildew, blackspot and rust and, (b) the loss of two larger than life rosarians and promoters of roses by the death of Harry Wheatcroft and by emigration to New Zealand of Sam McGredy. I believe the popularity of the rose is due for revival, and sales may again reach 40 million per year. These increases will be brought about through the introduction of three groups of disease resistant cultivars, introduced for special purposes.

Table 1. Approximate numbers of rose understocks planted annually in the U.K. (millions)

Year	1965	1966	1968	1971	1974	1977	1980	1983	1986
Imported	40	61	52	45	29	21	20	17	10
Home produced	—	—	—	—	10	11	10	10	13
Total	40	61	52	45	39	32	30	27	23

Miniature roses. Miniature roses are most suitable for indoor/outdoor pot culture. This market is already increasing quickly and is dominated by the Minimo range of Dr. Reuter of Holland and the Meillandina range from Meilland of France. These roses are being sold in 3" and 4" pots marketed on a large scale through garden centres and superstores. It is appropriate to note that the term "miniature" refers to the size of the flower and not to the size of the plant although they are generally small growers.

Patio roses. These are compact multiflora, floribunda, or clustered flower cultivars which have significant potential for bedding plants, for use in window boxes and confined places in the private garden. The ideal patio rose will have H. T.-shaped flower buds, weather-resistant flowers, scent, good repeat qualities, disease resistance, and compact growth. Most of the recently introduced cultivars have one or two of the qualities but rarely more than

three. There is a lot of activity in breeding these cultivars and I am sure they will quickly be improved.

Ground cover and landscape roses. In recent years the potential of this group has been highlighted with the introduction of a number of new vigorous growing cultivars, which have significant potential for large scale landscaping. At the same time the new introductions have highlighted the qualities some of the older and well-tried cultivars such as 'The Fairy', 'Frau Dagmar Hastrup', and 'Max Graf'.

Most of the recent vigorous cultivars are disease resistant but generally because of the dominance of *Rosa wichurajana* in their background are generally only once-flowering. They are ideal for large scale planting and for use in private gardens where there is plenty of space, or are required to smother difficult terrains such as banks. However, the full potential of ground cover roses will not be realised until we have a range of repeat flowering cultivars, which by the very nature of recurrent flowering will produce less vigorous growth more suitable for small gardens.

One cultivar, 'Snow Carpet', raised by Sam McGredy already meets these requirements and is selling in large quantities through garden centres. Five hybridists are currently putting a lot of effort into raising new ground cover and landscape cultivars, namely Kordes of Germany, Meilland of France, Illsink of Holland, Poulsen of Denmark, and to a lesser degree, Dickson's of Northern Ireland.

Propagation. All three groups are easily propagated on their own roots, which also makes them ideal subjects for pot culture. The fact that they are easily produced on their own roots is very significant when it comes to predicting who will propagate and grow the final product. In the past the rose trade has been dominated by a number of rose specialists who, by tradition, produce plants budded onto *Rosa laxa* and forms of *Rosa canina*.

In the future specialist propagating and liner nurseries will probably produce the liners while traditional container nurseries are best equipped to produce the new final product. The recently introduced cultivars are generally so easy to propagate that the type of cutting and system used will be the one that fits into the existing propagating system.

Direct rooting of very short single node cuttings, three or four cuttings per pot under polythene tents, will be probably just as effective as large 3" to 4" long root cuttings rooted in cutting trays under mist or fog. It would appear that materials taken from young plants indoors may prove to be more easily rooted and freer of contamination than those collected from outside. The possibilities of hardwood cuttings also needs close attention, as Meilland uses this technique effectively in Seville.

Micropropagation. This is already proving to be playing a part

in the production of miniature and ground cover roses with spectacular multiplication rates of times five, with the result that micropropagation may prove to be a very significant tool in volume production of ground cover roses.

Own-root ground cover roses have the significant advantage that suckers are a thing of the past and with perpetual flowering cultivars it will in the future be quite feasible to prune by mechanical pruners and flail mowers, followed by gathering up the prunings by vacuum cleaners, which will open up the market for large scale use. Costs of both planting and maintenance will be cheaper than turf. Scent and heps are additional qualities. Cultivars 'Grouse' and 'Partridge' are particularly heavily scented, as is the rugosa cultivar, 'Moje Hammarberg'. While everyone is familiar with the heps of 'Frau Dagmar Hastrup' and other rugosa cultivars the less dramatic heps of 'Grouse' and 'Partridge' should also be taken into account.

The growth habit of ground cover roses can be divided into three types: prostrate, mound forming, and arching. These can obviously be further divided into vigorous and less vigorous.

The different habits of growth can be put to good use in the landscape to give height and reduce monotony. They will all form a complete canopy over the ground in time but at different speeds, and it is therefore important the designer is aware of the plant habits to ensure that a complete canopy is formed in reasonable time.

Examples of cultivars are:

Prostrate: 'Grouse' 'Partridge', 'Max Graf Red', 'Max Graf Pink', 'Max Graf White', 'Snow Carpet' (less vigorous).

Mound forming: 'Pink Bells', 'Red Bells', 'White Bells', 'Bonica'.

Arching: 'Pink Wave', 'Ferdy', 'Red Blanket', 'Rosy Cushion'.