

How I Began to Grow Roses

By Jim Wagner

I recently received a request from the New England Rose Society, where I am a member, to recall how I began to grow roses for an article in the NERS newsletter.

My sister-in-law, Eula first introduced me to roses when I was probably in my teens or a little older. I was impressed by the beauty, fragrance, and their many colors. I later realized they were near perfect roses in an era when Hybrid Teas seemed to be the most popular. She also did well in rose show competitions exhibiting Hybrid Teas.

Many years later, a job transfer took me from my employer's Syracuse office to its home office in Keene, NH. A year later Doris and I got married in Syracuse, NY and lived in an apartment in Keene until purchasing our first house there the following spring. One of our first gardening experiences was to purchase five roses for "x" dollars as part of a local hardware store promotion where we planted them in our yard.

The following Christmas my sister-in-law gave us an ARS membership from which we heard of the New England Rose Society. We attended their meetings and became members where we gradually learned how to properly plant and care for growing roses. Doris and I greatly enjoyed growing roses and the many mutual friends we made in taking part in rose society activities.

After several years, we moved to a different home with a much larger yard that was in full sun the entire day, ideally meeting the criteria of six or so hours suggested for growing roses.

Over the next 25 or so years we gradually developed several rose beds around the perimeter of this house and eventually planted and successfully cared for about 150 roses that resulted in our becoming true rosarians. Our experiences included doing well in rose shows and becoming members of multiple rose societies in the Yankee District.

Eighteen years ago we returned to the Syracuse area to reduce the travel time to be nearer to our families and friends here. When doing so we brought about 20 or so of our roses from New Hampshire and over the next several years gradually increased the number of roses here to about 60 to 70 bushes or about half the number we left behind in New Hampshire.

A sampling of roses we especially liked includes Fragrant Cloud (HT) for its fragrance, Sally Holmes (Shrub) for its long lasting blooms and exhibition qualities, and Irresistible (Miniature) for its nice blooms and as a winter survivor.



Doris and Jim's New Hampshire garden, 1996. Left, with Blaze climber. Above, rose rock garden. Jim dug out all these rocks creating new beds.