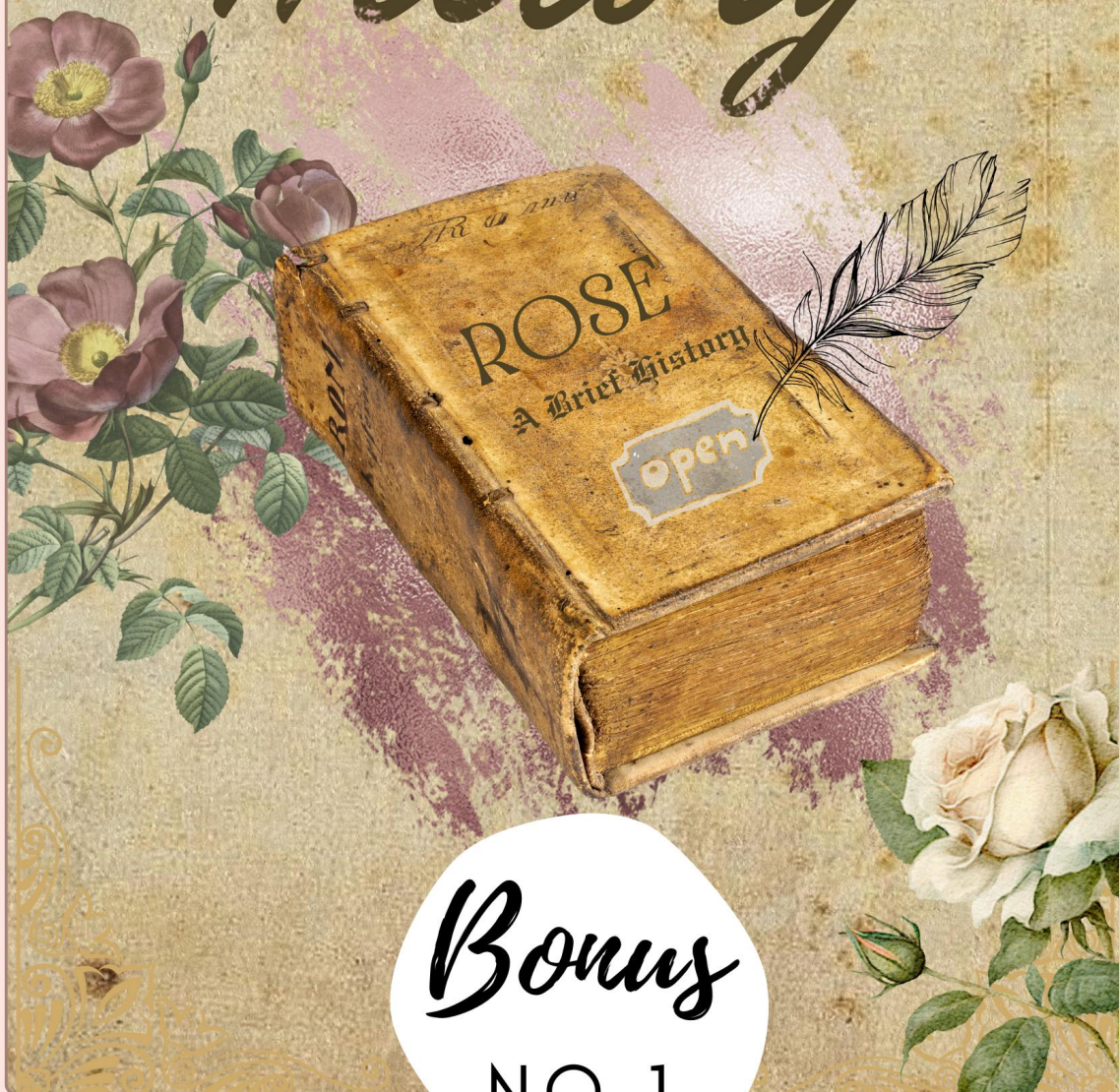


A Brief *History*



Bonus

NO.1

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Rose: A Brief History

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Shakespeare once wrote: "Of all flowers, methinks rose is best". Such sentiment is quite common and throughout history this elegant, symbolic flower has occupied a special place in the hearts and minds of people everywhere. Americans show their reverence for rose by purchasing 1.2 billion cut roses annually. Additionally, it is estimated that 150 million rose plants will be purchased by gardeners worldwide during the coming growing season. Perhaps there is no better time to explore rose history than February and Valentine's Day, the season of the year when, in the United States alone, an estimated 214 million roses will find their way into the lives of "significant others" everywhere.

Rose belongs to the family Rosaceae and genus Rosa; the latter contains about 150 species. According to Greek mythology, Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, gave the rose its name in honor of her son Eros by rearranging just one letter in his name. In time Eros gave the rose to Harpocrates, god of silence, as a bribe to conceal the weakness of the gods. From there, rose became symbolic of secrecy, silence and love.

Fossil records show rose to be one of the most ancient of flowers. It probably originated in Central Asia but spread and grew wild over nearly the entire northern hemisphere. Two historical geographical groupings of roses can be made: 1) European/Mediterranean roses, which includes the Gallicas, Albas, Damasks, Damask Perpetuals, Centifolias and Mosses, and 2) Oriental roses, which are represented by the China and Tea roses.

The cultivation of roses likely began in Asia about 5000 years ago and they have been an intimate part of human civilization ever since. Confucius wrote of growing roses in the Imperial Gardens about 500 B.C. and mentioned that the emperor's library contained hundreds of books on the subject of roses. Later, members of the Han dynasty were so obsessed with roses that their parks devoted to this flower took up so much land as to threaten the food supply, so the emperor ordered some to be plowed under.

Paintings on walls and other artifacts depicting roses were found in 5th century Egyptian tombs. It is said that Cleopatra was a fancier of roses and used them to try and seduce Mark Anthony. Reportedly she had her fountain filled with rose water and her chamber filled with two feet of rose petals in an attempt to win his affection. Additionally, the Persian King Nebuchadnezzar is said to have slept on a mattress filled with rose petals.

Centuries later, rose became synonymous with the lavish excesses often characteristic of the Romans, who associated rose with love, beauty, purity and passion. Roman emperors filled their baths with rose water and sat on carpets of rose petals for their feasts. Rose petals were used as confetti and Nero was said to be especially fond of having them fall from the ceiling at banquets (to the point dinner guest sometimes suffocated in their excess). So insatiable was the

demand for roses that peasants often were forced to grow them instead of food just to satisfy the Roman aristocracy.

Early Christians considered rose to be symbolic of paganism and their oppressors, the Romans, and were warned by church leaders not to plant it. This warning (evidently) was ignored and it slowly gained popularity and was used in religious ceremonies. In time, rose became a Christian symbol and has become a rich part of its culture and literature.

Alexander the Great is credited by some with having introduced rose into Europe while others attribute the latter to knights returning from the Crusades of 12th and 13th century. During the dark ages European monasteries preserved the tradition of rose and required that at least one monk be skilled in botany and knowledgeable about the virtues of rose. Later, in 17th century Europe, rose became so prized that roses and rose water were considered a source of legal tender and could be used for paying the debts commoners owed to royalty. It also was during this era that Napoleon's wife Josephine, a lover of roses, established one of the first extensive collections of roses at Chateau de Malmaison where her garden contained more than 250 rose varieties.

Presumably most of the roses in Josephine's garden were of the European/Mediterranean type for it was not until the late 18th century that the China group was introduced into Europe. Shortly thereafter the China rose (*Rosa chinensis*) was crossed by hybridizers with *Rosa gigantea* (a European/Mediterranean type) to form a new rose. Since some thought the newly-opened flowers of the resultant cross had the fragrance of an exquisite cup of tea, it was given the name tea rose. Decades later another type of rose was developed by crossing Damask rose (a hybrid formed in the Middle East by crossing *Rosa gallica* with *Rosa moschata*) with various species roses. Since the offspring of these crosses rebloomed freely they were given the name hybrid perpetuals and were quite popular through most of the nineteenth century.

A landmark achievement in rose breeding occurred in the mid-19th century when tea roses were crossed with hybrid perpetuals to give us the modern hybrid tea rose. Replete with their large flowers available in a palette of colors and their vigorous plants with glossy, green foliage, they are the most popular type of rose in the world today. Most consider them to be the standard of excellence by which all other types of roses are judged.

Several species of rose are indigenous to North America and rose was a favorite of many of those credited with shaping American history. William Penn imported 18 rose bushes from England in 1699. George Washington planted roses at Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson grew them at Monticello. John Adams is credited with planting the first rose at the White House and the formal rose garden that still exists today was established during the presidential term of Woodrow Wilson.

The American Rose Society lists over 40 different type of roses in its classification system. Generally, they are grouped into Old World Roses (introduced before 1867) and Modern Roses (developed after 1867). Additional to the hybrid tea, other important modern rose groups include polyantha,

floribunda and grandiflora. Polyantha roses are shrubby, low-growing roses with clusters of small flowers. They usually are quite hardy and bloom freely throughout the growing season. Floribundas were derived from crosses between hybrid tea and polyanthus roses. They produce large, hardy, shrubby bushes that bloom profusely and produce clusters of flowers. Grandiflora roses are the result of crossing floribundas with hybrid tea roses. Like their floribunda parent, they produce flowers in clusters. However, as their name implies, individual flowers are much larger and favor their hybrid tea parent in size.

It can be seen from the previous that rose lineage is quite complex. Over the centuries breeding efforts have attempted to produce the “ideal” rose, whatever the latter might imply to the developer. In spite of all the progress made in their improvement, rose still represent a formidable challenge to the gardener because of its susceptibility to diseases and cold temperatures. We tend to hold most dearly those things in life that are difficult to obtain. One can’t help but wonder if at least a small part of the fascination people have for roses lies in their fragile nature and the skill it takes to grow them. The next time you admire a rose consider the number of people throughout the course of civilization who also have paid homage to this exquisite flower.

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