

A Man and His Roses



Photo by Jim Kirschke: Bob Schelhorn with flowers of one of his favorite roses, 'Moonstone'.

Jim Kirschke is a Master Gardener Volunteer with the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County and a member of the Leon County Horticultural Advisory Committee. For editing questions he can be reached at 893-4901.

An award winning rosarian, waiter extraordinaire, single parent of two daughters, and self proclaimed stickler for details, Robert “Bob” Schelhorn tackles life with enthusiasm and commitment. I have known him since he served at the long since departed downtown restaurant, the Golden Pheasant. Anyone who has dined at one or more of Tallahassee ’s finer restaurants has probably encountered “Bob”. He has spent the past four and a half years at Albert’s Provence . It was only a few years ago that I learned of his passion for roses.

While dining one evening with Bob Schelhorn as our server, I commented on the near perfect fresh rose blossoms that graced our table. He informed me that they were from his garden and that growing hybrid tea roses had become his hobby. Further, he felt that they were so beautiful that he wanted to share them with others and what better way than to use them to decorate his customer’s dinner table. It certainly was a hit with our party.

We have enjoyed his roses many times since that evening and that gave me the idea for this article. We all have read a lot of material by the “experts” on such subjects as growing roses but how about hearing from someone like one of us, who is in it just for the fun and satisfaction of growing something beautiful? So I asked Bob if he would be interested in letting me interview him for an article, one amateur to another. He agreed and here is the result.

The first and most obvious question was “How did you get involved with hybrid tea roses?” His answer was simple. “Because they are pretty and smell good, the same reasons why everyone else likes them.” He went on to explain that with his profession as a waiter and his children being in school he had the time during the day to tend a garden, and roses had always been a favorite.

In response to my question concerning the high maintenance requirement of the hybrid tea roses, he pointed out that anything this beautiful takes some effort, and if you want to have a nice rose garden you must make a commitment to it, set up a regular program and diligently stick to it. He believes that keeping ahead of the problem makes taking care of roses much easier. My visit to his garden certainly confirmed this philosophy. His beds were very clean, well mulched, the bushes properly spaced and neatly pruned. Because Schelhorn believes in sharing his beautiful harvest, most of the blossoms had been cut at the time of my visit, probably to

adorn the tables of his customers that evening. The bushes themselves however looked very healthy, with thick green turgid leaves, almost totally free of blemish. What blossoms that did remain were beautiful, large, full and almost perfect.

When asked for his four favorite varieties, his choices were: Moonstone, Melody Parfumee, Veteran's Honor, and Gold Medal. He agonized over his answer, saying it was almost like asking him to choose his favorite child.

He readily agreed to share some of his techniques with us. First of all he suggested getting help from a "Consulting Rosarian". A list of them is available through the Tallahassee Area Rose Society, 2777 Millstone Plantation Road, Tallahassee FL 32312. His personal consulting rosarian is his long time friend Hank Rosen. Schelhorn is a member of both the Tallahassee Area Rose Society and the American Rose Society. Both of these organizations can provide a rose gardener with plenty of helpful information.

It came as no surprise that Schelhorn started by talking about the preparation of his rose beds. He has spent a great deal of time, effort and material in getting his beds ready to plant. This should really be the case with any garden bed if you are going to expect good results. Plenty of organic supplements and some slow release fertilizer went into his beds before he introduced the first rose. Without a good start you will be fighting a losing battle.

His next caution was to choose your plants with care. A bargain basement rose can wind up causing you plenty of headaches. Quality hybrid tea roses tend to be pricey but in the long run are well worth the cost. Choose your supplier carefully and then be just as careful with your choice in plants. They should be strong healthy looking plants with no sign of wilt. The root ball should be moist but not wet. The variety is up to you.

Plant the roses far enough apart to allow for good air circulation when they are full grown. This will be a major factor in controlling the dreaded fungal disease, black spot, that has defeated many rose growers. Mulch the beds well both to control weeds and to conserve water. Schelhorn recommends pine bark or cypress mulch depending on which is most pleasing to your eye. Schelhorn does his first pruning the end of February and then likes to keep his bushes neatly trimmed and does not let them get leggy. His desire to regularly harvest the blossoms fits right into this pruning scheme.

When it comes to fertilizing his roses Schelhorn uses organic fertilizers such as milorganite, cotton seed meal and alfalfa pellets applied in late February, supplemented with a Graco 13-6-6 with fifty percent slow-release nitrogen, applied monthly. This fertilizer is available at several local nurseries. To stimulate new shoots from the base of the plant, known as basal breaks, he applies a hand-full of magnesium sulphate (epsom salts) to the root area twice a year.

Watering is done as needed, and then only early in the morning. This is another guard against fungus. To maintain rose beds in this splendid condition takes daily observation. That is how you tell when the roses need water. The same is true for insect control. Schelhorn treats for insects only when they are detected and then he uses a systemic spray. He cautioned against indiscriminate spraying, because it will also kill the many beneficial insects like lady bugs, a big diner on the pesky aphid.

Finally we got to the subject of disease control and the bane of all roses "Black Spot" disease. Here is where Schelhorn calls for diligence. It is where he says his being a stickler for detail pays off. The only way to handle this and other disease problems in roses is to stay ahead of them. Establish a plan and stick to it. He considers spraying with a good rose fungicide once a week an absolute necessity in controlling fungus disease.

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He reminded me that it is the leaves of the plant that generate the food necessary for the health and beauty of the rose. Keeping them free of blemish will ensure those pretty blossoms we all strive for.

Bob Schelhorn's success with roses speaks for itself. He has regularly entered both the Tallahassee and Thomasville Rose Shows and has been a consistent winner in both. Recently he has been commissioned to build and maintain rose beds for two of his restaurant customers. It would appear that Bob's avocation is entering a new phase, and he can anticipate more interest and perhaps even profitability in its future.

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