

Local Gardener Rose to the Occasion



Photos by Brittany Harris, UF-IFAS Leon County Master Gardener: Bill Dority shares his love of roses with many in north Florida.

Jean McElveen is a Master Gardener volunteer with the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County, <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/>

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Mention roses at the Leon County Extension Office and you'll likely hear the name Bill Dority in the conversation that follows. That's because Bill, a Master Gardener and rosarian (cultivator of roses), has 40 years of experience here in Florida with these prickly pretties, qualifying him to serve as the resident expert on all things that are "coming up roses" in the Extension's demonstration gardens at 615 Paul Russell Road.

Recently I was able to pull Bill away from his roses long enough to share his knowledge and experience with those who may have a budding (pardon the pun) interest in roses, or perhaps are simply searching for something beautiful to put in a sunny spot in the garden. But first, I wanted to get his thoughts on the bad things I had heard over the years about roses being so finicky and sickly, so that's where I started. Bill's response, "Through my years of growing roses, I have learned to divide them into two categories: Category 1 or high maintenance, and Category 2 or low maintenance. I grow both, but for the home gardener and/or the new rosarian, I recommend starting out with the Category 2 roses, because it provides the most gardening pleasure with the least investment of time and money."

"The high maintenance Category 1 includes the Hybrid Teas, Grandifloras, Floribundas, Minis, and namesake Climbers. Their reputation as high maintenance stems from the intense care they require over the full span of rose cultivation. The back-breaker is the need for fungicide spraying every 10 to 14 days, or other treatments during our eight-month growing season, to combat the diseases black spot and powdery mildew, which can be fatal to the plants. Though some progress is being made to develop more disease resistant varieties in Category 1, help is not immediately at hand."

“So those are the fussy roses I’ve heard about?”

“Yes,” Bill replied, “but to me their beauty is irresistible and so I grow them, also.”

Bill continued, “But you just hold on a minute, because the Category 2 low maintenance garden roses are quite a different story. Each year they are also attacked by black spot and powdery mildew, but they survive without any spraying or other treatment and, although they may briefly look a little puny, they quickly recover and continue to thrive and bloom. This explains the term “survivor roses”, which at times is used to describe these hardy plants, some of which have a lineage dating from the 18th and 19th centuries.”

These Category 2 garden roses were really sounding good; kind of like roses with “training wheels”, perfect for a novice like me. Ah, but now the big question, would Bill reveal his source for these tough-as-nails beauties?

“Of course I will, and these plants are not usually expensive”, he said with a chuckle. Bill knows I’m thrifty. “My Category 2 Garden Roses are available through catalogues and local nurseries, plus I have had great success with many that were cultivated locally at the Goodwood Museum and Gardens.”

It was now obvious that Bill has a passion for roses. Some even call him the local “Johnny Appleseed” of roses. So I asked Bill more about that. After a short pause for thought he responded, “Yes that’s probably true, considering that over the past 4 years I have provided more than 400 of my Category 2 garden roses in a personal campaign to spread their appeal. Some of these have gone to the demonstration gardens at the Leon County and Jackson County Extension Offices, Maclay Gardens, and the Tallahassee/Leon County Fire Station 11 on Centerville Road. Plus, there are other projects in process at this time. Also, the largest portion of the plants went home with fellow Master Gardeners and would-be rosarians to enhance their gardens with the beauty of roses.”

Bill continued, “Even after 40 plus years, I have barely scratched the surface of the number of varieties to choose from, which excites me as I explore new choices each season. And I have been so fortunate, to date I cannot recall losing more than two or three of these roses under my care; knock on wood. Once you get started you are hooked for life, but, what a nice way to go!”

To meet Bill and see some of his roses, plan to attend the demonstration garden open house at the Leon County Extension Office, 615 Paul Russell Road, on Saturday, October 24, at 9:00 a.m.

Bill Dority’s Category 2 Low Maintenance Garden Roses include, but are not limited to:

Old Garden Rose varieties: Teas: Mrs. B.R. Cant, Marie Van Houtte, Duchesse de Brabant, Mons Tillier, Etoile de Lyon, and Mme Scipion Cochet. Chinas: Louis Philippe, Napoleon, Old Blush, Vincent Godrief, Archduke Charles, and The Green Rose. Bourbons: Souv de St. Anne’s, Levenson Gower, and Souv de la Malmaison.

Modern Rose varieties: Polyanthas: Perle d’Or, Verdun, Mevrouw Nathalie Nypels, and Martytje Cazant. Hybrid Musks: Ballerina, Prosperity, Clytemnestra. Climbers: Cramoisi Superieur and

Pink Perpetue. Shrub Roses: Knock Out, Carefree Beauty, Carefree Wonder, Cocktail, and the David Austin English roses. Hybrid Ragusa: Sarah Van Fleet.

Bill Dority's Maintenance Routine

Prune/trim the roses in mid-February and August for size and shape control.

Deadhead spent blossoms to promote blooming.

Fertilize in March and August; one cup per large plant of a balanced formula, water-in.

Mulch (leaves and pine straw) should be maintained from 2 to 3 inches thick.

Water if rainfall is less than one inch per week.

From November to mid-February, the plants need to rest.

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