

It's Showtime!

by Glenda Whitaker

We should have some hungry exhibitors out there who want to get back in the swing of some excellent competition with their roses. This time there will be a double opportunity for entering: Nashville Rose Society entries and Tenarky District classes. A show schedule indicating all opportunities for horticulture and arrangement entries can be accessed on our web site: www.nashvillerosesociety.com or www.tenarkydistrict.org. Familiarizing oneself with the show schedule, reading all the rules for horticulture and arrangements, is a good first step to get the juices flowing for good old fashioned competition.

Having read the schedule of classes, now is a good time to walk your garden and ascertain the roses you grow that could fit into any one of many categories. The horticulture specimen classes will be among the first to consider: hybrid teas (best blue ribbon entries will be in competition for the coveted Queen of Show, then King, then Princess); grandifloras (single and spray specimens); floribundas (single and spray), polyanthas; miniatures and mini-floras; modern shrubs and old garden roses (OGR); and large and small climbers. From these categories comes the tally of blue ribbons won by an individual to name the Sweepstakes Award Winner, another coveted milestone. Filling out entry tags in full (no shortcuts) is an important part of exhibiting, making sure the rose is correctly named and listed in correct section and class. The September meeting will be a good time to corner someone at the Welcome Table or one of our members to bone up on how to properly make a rose entry at the show.

Make a written note on the schedule you have printed out (or a copy obtained at the Welcome Desk at the September meeting) about your possibilities, walking in the garden again to plug in your dream entries. Just think how exciting it would be to win a blue, red, yellow, or green honorable mention ribbon, plus perhaps a keepsake trophy to give you even more bragging rights.

Moving on from individual horticulture entries, take a look at the Challenge Classes in the schedule. The Challenge Classes are just that: an extra challenge to the exhibitor to come up with enough top roses to put multiple specimens in any one challenge class as directed. The best entry in each has the extra benefit of a nice trophy for your effort.

Your pre-planning will pay off when it gets closer to show time Oct. 4th, making some final plans for cutting roses (as early as Monday before the Saturday rose show if you have refrigeration available). Your best roses, however, will be the freshest cut one or two days before or even the morning of the show, for vibrant color and substance to show their stuff. (Many times in our own exhibiting we have gone out in the garden at daylight and found that perfect rose to add to the number.)

Exhibiting does take some foresight and hard work, but the fun, fellowship, and competition are well worth it. Ted Mills, one of our best friends in our rose growing (Mill Magic Rose Mix), is a seasoned rose judge who gives us this word of wisdom:

“Always couple the competitive spirit with a sense of unselfishness toward your competitor.” Your fellow exhibitors can be your best friends answering those last minute identification questions that are inevitable. Be happy for every ribbon won, whether you or someone else. Remember, it is competition judged by trained, accredited American Rose Society Judges who have looked carefully over all the specimens and have done their utmost to choose the best. Volunteering to be a clerk for the judges allows one to observe what the judges are looking for in a winning specimen. Clerking etiquette requires one to remain silent during deliberation by the judging team, keeping keen ears and eyes open to their decision, with not a hint of interference.

As in any competition, there is an ultimate score where the evaluation begins. In this case, 100 points would be perfection. The rose bloom itself carries 60 of those points in its perfection of form, vibrant color true to the particular cultivar, substance (freshness), and size of bloom. Stem and foliage carry the next highest point count, for this part reveals another element of substance and health. There should be a pleasing stem length to compliment the size of the bloom, generally 15” - 18” in length, sufficient to allow for a good 2” – 4” to be submerged in the vase of water. This serves two purposes: sufficient length to anchor the rose in the vase for stability and secondly, to avoid one of the worst disappointments for an exhibitor – finding ones rose entry has drooped because of lack of water. (A freshly cut rose drinks up lots more water than one that has been well hydrated ahead of time.) Only the part of the stem submerged in the water should ever be stripped of its foliage for reasons of lessening bacterial growth, hurting the substance of the entry. The foliage above the water line should never be stripped. No naked ladies allowed!

When ready to cut, look for a hybrid tea that has a high spiraled center and cut at the ½ to ¾ stage of opening (depending on petal count of the cultivar and your experience as to how quickly the bloom might open). If refrigeration is not available, a rose can be cut at ¼ - ½ stage and allowed to open gradually in a dark or low light area of a room. Keep this in mind also if rain showers are predicted. When first cut from garden, it is important to hydrate the rose to its maximum by re-cutting the stem under water and plunging the length of the stem into deep water just up to bloom head. After at least two hours of deep hydration, transfer stem to lower water level with as little foliage under water as possible to discourage bacterial growth. Refrigerate until ready to take to rose show. Last minute cuts from the garden the night before can be left outside in the cool October air. Carefully transport specimens in a divided box, bloomsaver, or whatever can be kept stable while driving. Speed bumps can jostle a rose sufficiently to change the entry to the Open Bloom Class! Was a rose bloom decapitated from its stem? Put it in the floating bowl class. Never give up on finding a place for that last rose.

Finally, Robert B. Martin, Jr., an outstanding exhibitor from California, has given us a last minute prayer “At the End of Entries” as follows: (with apologies to Ogden Nash, he adds, and our apologies for this shortened version)

“Dear Lord, observe this bended knee, this visage meek and humble, and heed this confidential plea, voiced in a reverent mumble. -- Oh, when the chairman’s whistle blows, just once, Lord, let me grin. Let me have groomed my last fine rose and have my

entries in. Let me not bite more off the cob than I have teeth to chew. Please let me finish that last job before the rose is due. Consider, too, the pace of growth, sporadic though it be; why is it that the rose is loath to bloom on time for me? For many weeks the rose shows loom, and I have nought to play; then suddenly the roses bloom all on the self same day. Queens and Kings I pray thee send alone and not in bunches, or teach me I cannot pretend to groom them when the crunch is. Let me my roses not misname, nor mark them a wrong class; else harden me to the same of judges who walk past. One little lull, Lord, that's my plea, then loose the storm again: Just once, this once, I beg to be not in a jam. Amen.”

Poem captured from Rose Exhibitor's Forum, Winter 2002 , Robert B. Martin, Jr., Editor