

My Personal Choice of Rambling Roses

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Rambling roses as species and near species have been with us for a very long time. It was only towards the turn of the Twentieth Century, with the introduction of the genus of more colorful non-climbing hybrids by rose breeders, that a wider color range came about.

What is the difference between Ramblers and Climbers? Climbers are upright and rather stiff and unyielding by nature. Ramblers flower on the previous season's wood, and therefore seldom repeat. Climbers flower on shoots, which are produced in the same season and many of the more modern ones, really vigorous shrubs, are remontant. Ramblers usually have smaller leaves than Climbers and their flowers are borne in clusters. Climbers have larger flowers and tend to hold their blooms more upright.

Although a few Ramblers are happy to grow against walls, I prefer to use them on structures such as arches, obelisks and gazebos in more open parts of the garden. When pruning Ramblers, simply remove the old wood as soon as possible after flowering each year and tie young wood to their supports with soft string or ties.

Although Ramblers as a group name is the accepted designation in rose classification, I like the unclassified term "scrambler", which is very descriptive of the more vigorous and adventurous species and cultivars, in particular those that scramble up into the branches of trees or are capable of covering unsightly, decrepit buildings and such like.

The Multiflora Ramblers

A distinctive scrambling Rambler of Multiflora extraction is "Rambling Rector". First recorded in 1913 but certainly much older, its provenance now lost in the mists of time. This old rose appears to be gripped by an uncontrollable urge to thread its way up into the branches of trees or spread itself like a creamy-white blanket over any structure which happens to be in its way. Its semi-double fragrant flowers are followed in autumn by a mass of small, orange-red hips.

"Astra Desmond" has similar scrambling instincts to "Rambling Rector". In mid-summer it produces many cascading clusters of semi-double, white flowers, each very subtly color washed green ageing to off-white. "Blush Rambler" came along in 1903. Its rather more than single flowers are a soft blush pink and are arranged in large clusters. Slightly scented, this relatively thornless rose is ideal for arches, trellis and gazebos.

A Rambler that matures to about eight feet is the lovely fragrant, relatively thornless "Goldfinch" 1907, which gives a superb display of bright yellow, semi-double flowers that quickly change to primrose-yellow and then fade to cream. Each flower has golden-yellow stamens, which, from a distance, add strength of color to the overall spectacle.

Unlike most Ramblers, "Ghislaine de Feligonde" 1916, blooms more or less continuously throughout the summer, but, since prolonged flowering is not always compatible with vigorous growth, this is one of the less forceful of Ramblers. Its small semi-double to double

flowers open apricot but quickly pale to cream and are produced in sizable drooping clusters. Very fragrant, it has few thorns.

Another Multiflora hybrid of unknown provenance C.1900 is the fully double, fragrant “Bleu Magenta”, deep magenta shaded purple and silvery grey. Similar to “Bleu Magenta” is “Rose-Marie Viaud” 1924, its flowers a little more double and rather more purple. Probably the best known of the “blue” Ramblers is the scented, semi-double vigorous “Vielchenblau” 1909. All of the mauve/purple shades are superb when performing duets with some of the white, cream or soft yellow colored Ramblers and scramblers. I would even plant one of each color together, a few inches apart.

The Wichurana Ramblers

Ramblers of the Wichurana family group mostly come into flower a little later than other types, emulating *R. wichurana* itself the flowering season of which straddles the end of June to mid-July.

One of the best known of this group of Ramblers is the ubiquitous “Dorothy Perkins” 1901. Its small pink, almost fully-double flowers – with a smell rather than a scent – pack the plant to overflowing from midsummer well into July each year. If not sprayed these are then followed by a bout of powdery mildew, which afflicts the stems and foliage for the rest of the summer. The following year “Dorothy” will be as spectacular as ever. With many of the same traits as “Dorothy Perkins”, especially in the density of its cascading clusters, is the deep red to crimson “Excelsa” 1909.

Disease-free though is the beautiful Rambler “Emily Gray” 1918, which has large, semi-double flowers with a lovely fragrance and open from golden buds to bright yellow blooms, which eventually pale to primrose. A special feature is its lush, polished, bronze-green foliage.

Worthy of mention for its dark green, glossy foliage alone is the fragrant “Alberic Barbier”, similar in most respects to “Emily Gray” except that its flowers are fully-double and are lemon fading to creamy-white. “Gardenia”, 1899 a beauty which was lost to commerce for several decades has become available again. It is fully-double opening cushion-like and of soft buttery yellow paling to creamy-white in color. These have a fragrance redolent of apples. Its foliage is touched with maroon.

It is impossible to discuss the Wichurana Ramblers without mentioning “Albertine”, one of the aristocrats of the group. Its blowsy, semi-double-to-double flowers are a sort of lobster pink with a touch of gold deep down in their centres. No rustic arch should ever be without one.

A Few Good Rambler of Miscellaneous Classification

Two very good free-flowering Ramblers of some antiquity are hybrids of a species from the Mediterranean area. *R. sempervirens*. The first is “Adelaide d’Orleans” 1826 a delightful, scented, soft blush pink with small, very double flowers borne in clusters. Its flexible growth makes it ideal for arches. The second is “Felicite Perpetue” 1828. In mid to late June when it first comes into flower, this slender shooted Rambler spills over with clusters of small flowers each tightly packed with many soft blush pink to white petals.

A rose of which I have become very fond of is a hybrid of *R. soulieana*, a very bright red Rambler named "Chevy Chase" 1939. This rose has much to commend it, especially the length of its flowering season, which is a little longer than that of most Ramblers. Its flowers are fully double, button-shaped and borne in clusters.

One of the few roses that are good on walls is one closely related to the old China roses "Phyllis Bide" 1923. Strictly speaking perhaps it is a Climber. Each of its flowers are raggedly formed and carried in large, loose clusters, their color a mixture of lemon, buff and orange.

Hopefully, this very brief appraisal of Rambling roses will have whetted your appetite to try one or two. You will find them most rewarding.