

DIG THIS by Peg Tillery (for Jan or Feb) Time to Think Roses© 2009

In February many gardeners start dreaming about roses. There are even several gardeners in Kitsap County who literally have more than a hundred varieties of roses growing in their gardens. Other gardeners wouldn't grow roses if their lives depended on it.

Through the years breeders have been perfecting roses for disease resistance, ease of growing and wonderful appeal. Weeks Roses from Wasco, California supplies roses to many of our local nurseries: Bay Hay (Bainbridge Island), Bainbridge Gardens, Valley Nursery, Country Nursery and Gardens, Clear Creek Nursery and Port Orchard Nursery. In late fall and the dead of winter, they receive the current listings of available roses for the upcoming years. Talk to your favorite nursery staff person at these nurseries to find out their favorite varieties for 2009 or to order in new roses for you each year.

Weeks Roses was founded in 1938. The test gardens are at Cal Poly in Pomona. Each year researchers Tom Carruth and Christian Bedard of Cal Poly hand pollinate 50,000 flowers to produce more than 250,000 seeds. Over a period of 8-11 years they come up with the best of the varieties to finally release to the public. Check out the website www.weeksroses to see a fascinating slide presentation on the process, even if you'll never plant a rose, the process is amazing.

Roses receive AARS (All American Rose Selection) ratings. To see AARS rose selections through the years, visit the Woodland Park Rose Garden or the Point Defiance Rose Garden, each not too far away from Kitsap County.

The AARS website <http://www.rose.org> has a complete listing of roses just perfect for Kitsap County and the Pacific Northwest. I'm coveting Marmalade Sky a 3-foot by 3-foot beauty with five to eight blooms per stem. Each blossom has 17-25 petals. It will bloom for months. Fourth of July is a climber. It's the first climbing rose to win the AARS award in 23 years. Blossoms are red with white stripes. The red actually has hints of orange, the white stripes hint of peach, the center is a bright golden yellow. This climber grows 12-14 feet tall and has the scent of "fresh cut apple and sweet rose."

If you're tempted to grow roses, make sure you have lots of sun. Six hours a day is the barest minimum and more sun each day is even better. Roses also love good air circulation. They need regular watering so plant them in a zone of plants in your garden that need regular water (several times a week during July through September). Use a soaker hose or drip system to send water directly to the root zone so you're not wasting precious water resources. Always select varieties that are resistant to pests and diseases. Rose propagators have developed literally hundreds of easy-care varieties.

For gardening in small spaces, try the new ground cover shrub roses or even miniature roses. "Flower Carpet Roses" have been a favorite of mine for about nine years now. You can't go wrong with these beauties, they thrive on neglect with very little watering once established. Once a month is quite sufficient for them. Leaves are glossy and flowers are

abundant. Miniature roses live happily for years and years in containers. Water them as you would any containerized plant and fertilize with a liquid organic fertilizer.

Check out "Dig This" archives at http://kitsap.wsu.edu/hort/dig_this/dig_this_toc.htm for nine years of columns on a wide variety of gardening topics.