

Newspaper Column

Question:

I love roses but they are just too hard to care for because of all the diseases they get. What roses can you suggest that don't require so much spraying with chemicals.

Answer:

Roses are making a come back for gardeners like me that refuse to grow things that need constant spraying. The hybrid tea roses are beautiful but they are not for the "carefree" gardening crowd that I belong. The "Knock Out" rose, has changed my attitude toward roses and they may be the hottest thing to ever hit the rose world.

"Knock Out" rose was developed by Wisconsin rose breeder William Radler who has been growing roses since his youth. He was the long time director of the Boerner Botanical Garden in Minneapolis and has recently served as consulting rosarian for the Chicago Botanical Garden.

His breeding efforts began about 20 years ago and focused on developing repeat blooming, cold hardy roses that didn't get disease, especially black spot. In the early stages of his breeding career, he raised about 600 seedlings a year under fluorescent lights in his basement.

In 2000, his efforts won him the prestigious All-America Rose award, and it was introduced into the trade that same year. This new rose quickly became the fastest selling rose in history, with 250,000 sold the first year alone. The selection was called "Knock Out" (*Rosa 'Radrazz'*) and it is a shrub rose that grows about three feet tall and wide. It produces terminal clusters of single, three-inch diameter cherry red blooms. As long as it continues to grow through the summer, it will continue to bloom. Some claim it's one of the longest blooming roses on the market.

Part of Knock Out's success is because of marketing skills but a lot of it is because "Knock Out" is just a great rose. Reports from about anywhere roses are grown indicate it is disease resistant and just keeps blooming.

The principle of breeding and selecting plants in an environment where the plant is to grow is certainly not new, but many rose breeding companies ignored the principle. Until recent years, most roses were bred in California where disease pressure was almost nonexistent. No wonder rose growers had become so frustrated with modern roses.

Radler has introduced a number of sister lines including pink and blush varieties, and the "Double Knock Out", that is now available.

Like most roses, "Knock Out" is best in full sun or light shade in a fertile, well drained soil. These are shrub roses, so their wintertime appearance leaves a bit to be desired, so use it with low evergreen shrubs to compensate for its winter nakedness. Prune it in the spring just before new growth starts as you would other shrub roses. Prune during the

growing season as needed to control size. Water and fertilize as the season progresses to ensure plants continue to grow and set new flower buds. Sit on the porch and enjoy your (almost) carefree roses.

Tony Glover