

Gardens

Roses: 'This is the best time for gazing, sniffing and falling in love with them'

Everything you need to know about the nation's favourite flowers

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Rose 'Gertrude Jekyll': 'Roses weave their way into our lives.' Photograph: Alamy

Everyone has known a rose. Perhaps your nana grew one from which she would snip the odd blowsy bloom to place in a little vase on the windowsill above her sink, or your landlord's slack garden maintenance meant mornings dodging wet droplets hanging from sodden flowers along a rainy garden path. Maybe you once plucked soft, cool handfuls of petals to stuff into bottles to make perfume that sat and turned rank a week later, or kept a single rose from a lover until it crisped dustily to pieces.

Roses weave themselves into our lives in a way no other flower does, and they have our devotion in return: in every annual [nation's favourite flower](#) poll, they leap into first place, leaving lilies, tulips and sweet peas flailing in their wake.



The rambler 'Adélaïde d'Orléans' covers a pergola at the David Austin garden in Staffordshire. Photograph: Gap Photos//Howard Rice

If you don't have a rose in your life at the moment, it is a good time of year to remedy this. It is not, from a horticultural point of view, the best time for planting - that would be in autumn or winter, when they have lots of time to develop their root system before any top growth is required - but it is the best time for gazing, sniffing and falling in love with them, which is of course the most important part. Once you have found the one you want, you can plant now, too, as long as you are prepared to keep it well watered all summer. This is absolutely the time to wander gardens, garden centres and nurseries, and stick your nose deep into a few roses to find out which one best evokes the perfumed hillsides of Iran, the perfect English country house summer garden, or your nana's kitchen.



Rose 'Alchemist'. Photograph: Getty

For shade

Generally roses want sun and lots of it; the best and most plentiful displays will always come from roses that bask in full sun all day. But there are varieties that will tolerate shade for some of the day, so seek these out if you are determined to fit a rose into a less than ideal spot. Pale roses are particularly good in darker corners, as they light them up. Try the almost thornless 'A [Shropshire Lad](#)', which has beautiful cupped and ruffled flowers in pale pink, with a rich fruity fragrance. Flowers will last longer and can keep their scent better in shade, too. 'Susan [Williams-Ellis](#)' is a vigorous, early-flowering, pure white rose with a classic old rose fragrance, and worth trying in a little shade.



Rose 'Susan Williams-Ellis'. Photograph: Alamy

For containers

If you don't have soil into which roses can sink their roots, you can still have them in containers. Choose as large a pot as you can muster. Roses thrive best in deep, rich, moist but well-drained soil; recreate that richness with a compost such as [Dalefoot Wool](#) or [Carbon Gold biochar](#) and be prepared to keep them well watered and fed in summer. Poor, starved-looking plants with few flowers will be the result if you neglect them. 'Sir [Walter Scott](#)' has a short, bushy habit and deep pink flowers with an old rose fragrance, and is good in a pot. It flowers all summer long. 'Robin [Redbreast](#)' is a ground-covering rose that grows happily in a container. It is little and low-growing, and has the brightest red single flowers with sunny yellow stamens.



Rose 'Veilchenblau'. Photograph: Alamy

For fences and walls

Whether you have a short fence to clothe or an ugly outbuilding to hide, there is a rose that will do the job fragrantly and prettily. Some climbers are particularly good at staying compact, and 'Gertrude [Jekyll](#)', which grows to around 1.8 metres (5ft), is one of the best at this, its stems covered in perfect ruffled pink flowers with a beautiful fragrance. 'Alchemist', with soft, salmon-orange flowers and a strong scent, grows a little larger, to around 3 metres (10ft). For clothing bigger structures and for growing into trees, consider the beautiful and dramatic rambler 'Veilchenblau', which grows up to 6 metres (20ft). The flowers have an intense fruity scent and open a bruised purple colour, fading to lavender. 'Rambling [Rector](#)' is another beauty for climbing through trees, producing pure white, scented, double flowers in great clouds.

For scent

Every rose we come across, we lift to our noses, breathe in deeply and sigh "Ah!", whether or not it deserves it. In the past, breeders became caught up in developing roses for a particular shapely bloom and let scent fall by the wayside, so many of those used as cut flowers lack fragrance. Happily, breeders of garden roses now realise that scent is high on the list of must-haves; as long as you avoid the hybrid tea roses bred in the low-scent years, you shouldn't find it too hard to track down a great-smelling rose. Some are particularly worth seeking out for their fragrance. 'Ispahan' is a very old Middle Eastern damask rose with a heady, strong and sweet fragrance, and clear pink flowers. 'Charles de [Mills](#)' flowers only once, but spectacularly and fragrantly, with flat discs of rich purple, full-petalled flowers. 'Jude the [Obscure](#)' has beautifully cupped and full, soft apricot flowers, and a delicious fruity scent. Plant any of these and you will be sniffing and sighing with utter sincerity every June and July for years to come.

Where to see roses

[David Austin Roses](#) is the Wolverhampton home of the English roses bred by David Austin for beauty and fragrance. It has show gardens, a nursery and tearoom.

[Coughton Court](#) in Warwickshire contains a rose labyrinth planted with more than 75 different types, all interplanted with shrubs, perennials and climbers.

[RHS garden Rosemoor](#) in Devon boasts many varieties. Its rose festival is on until 30 July, with a trail that takes in a historic, scented journey through the garden.

[Carolside Gardens](#) in Earlston, Scotland, are 200 years old and have an impressive range of historical varieties, including a national collection of pre-1900 Gallica roses.



Rose 'Shropshire Lad'. Photograph: Alamy

Me and my garden: 'We planted a rose garden with our daughter's ashes'

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