

My Favorite Hybrid Teas

by Robert B. Martin Jr

"Nobody goes there anymore because it's too crowded."

-Yogi Berra on a famous restaurant

The most popular rose class is, and has been for many years, the hybrid tea. The aristocrat of the garden, the hybrid tea accounts for well over half of the sales of all garden roses and over 90% of cut roses sold by florists. With its large pointed buds and high-centered form, the hybrid tea is what most people identify as a "rose".

Like the famous restaurant in Yogi's quotation, it has become popular for angle-seeking journalists and wishful fans of other types of roses to conclude that nobody grows hybrid teas any more because they are too popular. Other writers emphasize other classes or more unusual roses because of the ubiquity of the hybrid tea. I also have been guilty of this practice, having more recently published articles on my favorite polyanthas, floribunda and other varieties, while neglecting my favorite, the hybrid tea. In this article, I propose to rectify that oversight.

The selection of roses to grow is usually a very personal decision and this is so with hybrid teas. As an exhibitor, I like hybrid teas with classic exhibition form. I also grow roses for their flowers, so I am partial to hybrid teas that produce abundant bloom. With these likes in mind here – in reverse order – a dozen of my favorite hybrid teas:

12. 'Touch of Class', orange-pink, Kriloff 1984. ARS rating 8.9. AARS

1986. The top exhibition rose in the US from 1986-1996, and again in 1998, this rose defined the exhibition rose in my formative years as an exhibitor. It also spawned a new ARS color class since it is neither orange, nor pink, but a pleasant combination of the two. The color actually varies by climate. For example, I have seen specimens in Northern California that are almost deep orange. The form is always exquisite, with a classic high centered spiral. The bush is of moderate height and requires spraying. Flower production is adequate but not as abundant as I'd like. It is somewhat passé as a show rose because the judges have seen so many superb examples to measure it against, and it loses color under refrigeration. Still, the beautiful specimens on the bush can take my breath away and if it chooses to bloom just before a show, it can still win.

11. 'Elizabeth Taylor', deep pink, Weddle, 1985. ARS rating 8.4. Another excellent exhibition rose that has seen its best days on the show tables, this is a sentimental favorite of mine. I won my second queen with it in 1994 and have often placed it on the show table. The electric pink blooms have great form and the rose is a "cropper", which means that it produces a large flush of bloom at the same time. It does mildew if not sprayed and the growth tends to be angular. It also often has a white color fault in the bloom, which is distracting. So it's not perfect. But it produces consistently beautiful blooms and that's close enough.

10. 'Double Delight', red/white blend, Swim & Ellis 1977. ARS rating

8.4. AARS 1977. Continuing with sentimental favorites, I have grown this rose in every garden since its introduction. The distinctive white blooms with red edges rarely have form since the centers split. But the color is breathtaking and the red is more pronounced in the sun. Best of all, the fragrance is heavily spicy and distinctive. The bush is of medium height and requires spraying to avoid mildew. Flower production is adequate to generous.

9. 'Mister Lincoln', dark red, Swim & Weeks 1964. ARS rating 8.3. AARS 1965. The biggest winner of the fragrance class at a show is another old sentimental favorite that I have grown in every one of my gardens. The blooms are a deep velvety red, nicely formed, but not enough so to win at modern shows. The fragrance is a strong damask that can make my head jerk back. The bush is very tall and it's a strong grower with lots of bloom. It also requires spraying.

8. 'Signature', deep pink, Warriner, 1996. ARS rating 7.6. This is an outstanding exhibition rose that has won four queens of show for me. The large, deep pink blooms have a cream reverse and are of classic exhibition form. The blooms have good substance and refrigerate well. The bush is not much to write home about, particularly the foliage, which has a sensitivity to spraying and will occasionally drop its leaves for no particular reason. But nearly every bloom is of top show quality so I sign off on its faults.

7. 'Black Magic', dark red, Tantau 1997. ARS rating 7.7. This is a florist rose that is an excellent garden rose as well. The dark red velvet blooms are nearly black and have excellent spiral form that is a bit flat. Surprisingly, the blooms do not burn on the edges in heavy sunshine, though the bloom size can be small in heat. The blooms are presented on long stems, as befits a florist rose, and it lasts a long time in a vase. The rose needs to be cut tight and it will open better. It is a very vigorous plant with deep green glossy foliage and flowers adequately.



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6. **'Moonstone'**, white, Carruth 1998. ARS rating 8.2.

6. **'Cajun Moon'**, white, Carruth 2001. ARS rating (7.8). OK – I am fudging here by giving you two for the price of one. These two roses were sister seedlings that Tom Carruth had to choose between for introduction. He chose 'Moonstone' but a bed of 'Cajun Moon' accidentally got dug up and sold into commerce. Exhibitors discovered it and so Tom registered it as well. Both have large, creamy white blooms with a blush of pink, more so in the center. 'Moonstone' is an exceptionally vigorous bush with leathery foliage that produces blooms in great abundance. Some have exceptional form and 'Moonstone' was the top exhibition rose in the country from 1999 through 2004. The form, however, is inconsistent and in cooler weather, the blooms are often muddled and split. 'Cajun Moon' is a taller bush that is thornless at the top. The blooms have fewer petals and are much more consistent in form, making it also a top exhibition rose. I like them both and am glad I don't have to choose between them.

5. **'Hot Princess'**, deep pink, Tantau 2000. ARS rating 7.9. This is another florist rose that I discovered at the Los Angeles Flower Mart before it became available for the garden. It is a very vigorous bush with strong straight stems, glossy green foliage and perhaps wider leaf spacing than I'd like. The form is excellent with neon pink blooms that spiral into pinpoint centers. It lasts a long time as a cut flower. It grew well in California and loves the Arizona desert where it

thinks it's in a hot house.

Intermission...

'Gold Medal', Grandiflora, medium yellow, Christensen 1982. ARS rating 8.4. And now for an editorial break before I reveal my top four favorites. The grandiflora is a class adopted in the U.S. originally to explain 'Queen Elizabeth', which has the size and large blooms of a hybrid tea, but the flowering habit of a floribunda. The rest of the world have never accepted the class and considers 'Queen Elizabeth' to be a cluster flowered rose. The class has also not gathered much favor of late in the U.S. and roses classed as grandifloras in recent years have proved a mixed bag of dissimilar roses that, with some exceptions have not proven to be favorites. 'Gold Medal' is, however, the principal exception and could easily have been classed a hybrid tea. For years, when asked the question of what is my favorite rose, I replied 'Gold Medal'. It is a hugely vigorous bush that covers itself with golden striped yellow buds that open into golden blooms of excellent form. It also has a delightful fruity fragrance. It was a solid show rose in its time and can still win any class designated solely for grandifloras.

4. **'Veteran's Honor'**, dark red, Zary 1999. ARS rating 8.1. Returning to my list of favorites, I give you an excellent show rose of exquisite form. The large, solid red blooms are huge, with thick petals and invariably have great form. It is somewhat stingy of bloom and for show it is difficult to groom the large, long petals down to the horizontal. The bush is very vigorous, however the foliage can be coarse and the stems can have trouble carrying the heavy blooms. It also lacks fragrance. But so what? – I love a red hybrid tea and this is quite simply the best.

3. **'St. Patrick'**, yellow blend, Strickland 1996. ARS rating 8.0. AARS 1996. This is the best yellow hybrid tea ever. The blooms are a bright yellow with green at the edges; the amount of green varies with the weather. The blooms have tremendous substance and the chlorophyll in



the petals, which makes the green edging, permits the rose to thrive in bright sunshine and heat. It is a very vigorous grower that produces long stem multi-petaled blooms that last and last as a cut flower. The blooms are sometimes flat and the centers are often muddled, however the bush makes up for this deficiency by producing an abundance of blooms such that there are plenty with good queenly form. Until recently it was my favorite hybrid tea, having replaced 'Gold Medal'. It was bred by the amateur hybridizer, Frank Strickland, who was an excellent exhibitor before retirement and has always been a good friend.



2. **'Marilyn Monroe'**, apricot blend, Carruth 2002. ARS rating (7.8). This rose, like its parent 'St. Patrick', loves heat and is the best exhibition rose for Arizona. The light apricot blooms have consistent excellent spiral form, perhaps a little flat, and thick petals that are impervious to thrips. It blooms abundantly on a vigorous

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bush with disease-resistant foliage. It is a little slow to get started, but a little patience will be amply rewarded.

1. **'Gemini'**, pink blend, Zary 2000. ARS rating 8.2. AARS 2000. And now for my favorite, the rose that has it all. **'Gemini'** is a vigorous upright rose that produces many high-centered classic exhibition-form blooms of cream



with a coral pink edge and a cream reverse. The blooms come singly and in clusters. The blooms darken in sunshine and are best cut tight and opened indoors. It refrigerates very well and is a superb exhibition rose, having moved into the number one spot in 2005. The foliage is clean and well proportioned. It is also a great garden rose, having earned the ARS Member's Choice Award in 2004 for the rose that ranked the highest in the annual Roses in Review Program. If you are going to grow hybrid teas, this one demands a place in your garden.

'Peace', yellow blend, Meilland 1945. ARS rating 8.1. AARS 1945. Finally, for a bonus choice, I include the all-time favorite rose that I have grown in every one of my gardens. It has won every award possible and is considered THE



hybrid tea of the 20th Century. It has beautiful buds that open slowly into large generous blooms shading from yellow to pale gold and fringed with a delicate pink. The bush is strong with dark green, glossy foliage and the blooms are produced in abundance. It set the standard for the modern hybrid tea and was a superb exhibition rose in its time, but the form is too globular by modern standards. But it can win as a classic hybrid tea and also makes a beautiful open bloom. It was introduced in 1945 in Pasadena, California, with the statement, "We are persuaded that this greatest new rose of our time should be named for the world's greatest desire: PEACE." In these times, 60 years later, that continues to be a great desire and I wish you all peace and beautiful hybrid teas.