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Newer Miniature & Minifloras in Our Garden

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Each year, from 1998 through 2001, I wrote an article titled "New Miniatures in My Garden". As a long-time fan of miniature roses, it offered my personal evaluation of some of the new minis based on my own experience in my Pasadena, California, primarily from an exhibitor's viewpoint. The series was popular and the articles were re-published widely throughout the country.

I have not written a comparable article since moving to Arizona in 2002 – at least not until now. A stranger in a strange land, I first wanted to see how minis grow here and what differences there are in climate, soil conditions and other factors affecting the growth of miniatures. And what did I find out? Well, as I have said now perhaps too many times, Arizona is not California. And yes, it is hot here – as hot as I imagined. But what I had not imagined is how long it stays hot. Day after day after day, 100-degree temperatures just pound the roses and more so the rose gardener. The first year I was here, it set some kind of a record with 120 plus days in a row of temperatures over 100 degrees. Also it is much more dry and windy than I had imagined. The hot dry winds blow through the rose garden and suck the substance from the roses so that their vase life, if "life" can be used as a word here, is marginal at best.

But you can grow roses in Arizona and beautiful roses at that. Our blooms of April and November are as

good as I have seen in California. The rose people are nice, maybe even nicer. And the weather of the winter, including beautiful months like February and March, is a lot nicer than California.

So what does this have to do with my series of articles on new miniatures? It has a lot to do with it. I still order a lot of new miniatures and minifloras each year and several hybridizers send me roses to test. My latest inventory tells me we are now growing 160 miniatures and minifloras of 97 different varieties. There are also a number that have departed from my garden, either because they died in the heat, or because I removed them. (I use the word "I" here intentionally because Dona, sweetheart that she is, is loathe to remove a rose from the garden; in fact I cannot remember a time when she suggested one should be removed. "I", on the other hand, am Dr. Death when it comes to roses that are not performing.) Anyway, there are a lot of new miniatures and minifloras to evaluate and I thought it would be useful to reinstate my series, this time from an Arizona perspective.

I have commented above on the climate differences and it is also useful to keep in mind what this means when it comes to evaluating new roses. In California, I typically started miniatures in one-gallon containers and moved them to 7-gallon squat containers as they matured. If they did fine in a 7-gallon container I left them there, but if they continued to get large I would seek a ground space for them. Ground space was at

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(Continued from page 1) *New Minis/Minifloras* a premium in my former California garden so most miniatures never made it to the ground.

In California I typically received the new miniatures in the late fall or winter. The first bloom cycle came in mid to late April and there would often be some blooms to evaluate. A second very good bloom cycle came in June and there was more to see. The roses continued to grow well during the summer, thought the blooms were of lesser quality, and I got two more summer bloom cycles to consider. Finally, there was a magnificent fall bloom that came in mid to late October. Consequently, after a year with the new roses, I had a pretty good idea what I was dealing with.

Arizona is different. The miniatures still arrive in late fall and during the winter. The first bloom cycle comes in early to mid April so the roses are a little less established at the time of the first bloom than in California. By mid May, the 100-degree weather arrives and the question becomes not what they look like, but whether they're going to survive. The only evaluation I can give during the summer, or by its end, is whether the plant lived or not. Finally after this brutal baptism, they come back and I get a decent fall bloom in the first year. But compared to California I have had the opportunity of seeing but one good bloom cycle in the first year.

Another difference with California is in the use of containers. In California most of my miniatures and minifloras spent their lives in containers. But containers are tough in Arizona. The sun beats on their sides and they become as ovens to the roses. Watering must be done daily, sometimes twice daily, and the penalty for an overlooked drip line inadvertently knocked out of a container is death to the rose. But we do have more land here than I did in California so most of the miniatures get a spot in the ground after a year or so.

The bottom line is that it takes longer to evaluate a new miniature or miniflora in Arizona than it does in

California. It takes at least two years, and sometimes three. This means that we need to be patient with our newer roses and not be so quick to pass judgments and whip out the shovel. It also means we need to be a little more selective in the first place so we don't waste a lot of time and space on roses that are not going to do well for us. To help with that, here is my evaluation, Arizona style, of the newer miniatures and minifloras added to our garden over the last three years.

MINIATURES:

'Aristocrat', pb 2001 (White)

Deep pink blooms of occasional excellent form that moves quickly. Too petite to be Queen and the bush stopped growing, so I sent one of two away. The remaining bush, perhaps aware of the exile of its brother, took off and grew strongly with some excellent blooms this last April. But, the blooms are still petite and to rose show judges, petite is pretty much passé.

'Baby Boomer', mp 2001 (Benardella)

Clean pink, well formed blooms on a large bush. Blooms are too small to compete for queen and move to quickly for use in a collection. Bush is large and vigorous, but the canes are bare at the bottom and much more susceptible to sunburn than typical.

'Bees Knees', yb 1998 (J&P)

This is simply a great miniature that every exhibitor and rose gardener should be growing. The bush is huge and vigorous and simply covers itself with hundreds of blooms of exhibition quality. The color comes out best in bright sunshine and there's plenty of that here.

'Breath of Spring', my 2002 (Bridges)

A bud with a spiral center suggests it will open to classic form, but then it loses its center quickly and the outer petals don't come down to the horizontal. May be a good show rose for judges who like tulips, but I don't think so here. It makes a very tall, upright bush with so-so foliage.

'Caliente', dr 2005 (Benardella)

Makes dark red blooms of excellent

form, but I'd like to see some more vigor and stronger stems. The bush, which came as a test plant before it was introduced, is now in the ground and still pretty puny. Perhaps a little more time.

'Dancing Flame', yb 2001 (Tucker)

Well established bushes gave me the rich yellow color and the form is impeccable. A queen candidate at every show. Bushes have more dieback from sun than average, but keep on putting out new canes to replace the ones that turn to toast.

'Dorothy Rose', ob 1998 (Jones)

This is a very nice orange and white striped single bred by ARS President Steve Jones and named after his mother. I have had it less than a year, but it has shot up like a weed and is already producing beautiful blooms. I need to find a place in the ground for it.

'Doris Morgan', ob 1998 (Bridges)

A deep pink with a silver reverse. It is very vigorous and blooms abundantly, but the large blooms just can't seem to make sufficient stems or consistent form, other than that of a small cabbage.

'Erin Alonso', my 2002 (Alonso)

A bright yellow sport of the superb Bees Knees, with all of its good qualities. It does appear to have fewer petals than 'Bee's Knees' and is not as consistent in its show form.

'Heather Sproul', mp 2005 (Sproul)

The very first bloom on a young plant in a one-gallon pot was excellent and of royal quality. The bush appears to have adequate vigor and makes nice clear pink blooms of excellent form that continue to come consistently on maturing plants. I think this will be an outstanding show and garden rose for Arizona.

'Nancy Jean', ab 2002 (Rickard)

The breeder, my friend Vern Rickard, registered it as a miniature and despite pleas from around the country, refuses to re-register it a miniflora. In Arizona it is twice the size of any

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(Continued from page 3) *New Minis/Minifloras* miniature I grow. By any classification the rich tan blooms have superb form similar to the great miniature 'Fairhope'. It is slow to repeat and stingy of bloom, but nearly every one is of show quality. This is for exhibitors and arrangers who like the novel color.

'Norwich Sweetheart', mr 2004 (Berg)

A well-behaved little bush produced bright neon pink blooms of pretty good form, but the blooms had been too petite. Threatened with a shovel the bushes took off and produced some high quality show blooms this spring.

'Pixie Dust', yb 2003 (Denton)

This is a petite beauty from Canadian hybridizer Tony Denson with pink and white blooms of form similar to Kristin. I'm still afraid it will be too small to show well, but I put it in the ground to see if I can get a larger bush and blooms.

'Ruby', mr 2001 (Benardella)

Makes little bitty red blooms like rubies here. The form is good, but stems are thin and there just is not enough size. It is gone.

'Tammy Darlene', pb 2001 (Rickard)

Once upon a time last spring I was looking at some nice blooms on Nancy Jean and next to it I observed this killer show bloom of pink with a yellow reverse. The name tag had disappeared so I went into the house to check my records and concluded this was 'Tammy Darlene'. Pity it was too early in the week for it to hold and be Queen, but I am impressed and bought it a new name tag. It is bred from 'Fairhope' and might be a sleeper here.

MINIFLORAS:

'Butter Cream', my 2002 (Martin)

My mini-flora is clearly one of the best. Here it blooms abundantly on a mannerly, clean plant with strong stems. The form is consistent, even on the youngest of plants, although occasionally the center is low and will benefit from some light grooming. The foliage is iron-clad and this makes a great

garden bush in Arizona. Everyone should be growing it.

'Charismatic', pb 2004 (Tucker)

A superb show rose with consistent color of rich red mixed with white, excellent form and great substance, all appearing generously on an upright bush with good vigor. Inexplicably, Robbie Tucker has dropped it from his Rosemania.com catalogue. Call and pester him to sell one to you – this is an excellent rose for Arizona.

'Class of '73', pb 2004 (Tucker)

Last year I reported in *Horizon Roses* that this rose has impeccable form, but absolutely no discernable color, sort of a dirty white with grungy pink overtones. But as soon as those woods appeared in print a beautiful spray and beautiful bloom appeared, creamy white with an orange edge. The bloom won miniflora queen and the spray was judged the best horticultural entry in an Arizona show. So I kept it. The bushes are strongly vigorous. I do not recommend it for the average gardener.

'Conundrum', yb 2003 (Tucker)

This is a superb miniflora for Arizona. The color is rich and the form is excellent, though the blooms can move a little fast and needs to be cut tight. We've already won four queens with it here. The bush is huge and the foliage often ratty, mildew-prone and oversized. But the blooms work for show at all stages of bloom. There is no conundrum here – this is a great show rose. It is also good for those who like bright color in the garden and are willing to put up with a ratty bush to get it.

'Dr John Dickman', m 2002 (Bridges)

New bushes in pots are off to a great start producing very well formed blooms of deep purple blooms with red edges on long stems. The stems are still a little weak, but the bushes appear to have great vigor. They have just gone into the ground. Mike Jepsen has shown some beautiful examples in Arizona shows.

'Double Gold', my 1999 (Saville)

Adequate grower that produced nary a

show bloom, nor much of anything else in the way of a flower. It is gone.

'Jerry Lynn' ab 2004 (Tucker)

Moderate bush produced pretty porcelain pink blooms of good form, but they have very little substance and the form is very soft and will not hold in Arizona. I like the color and have been keeping the bush hoping that maybe in the late fall it will do better.

'Leading Lady', 2006 (Benardella)

This is a brand new 2006 Award of Excellence winner that I have had but a year. It is already producing nicely formed light pink/white bicolor blooms and looks like its going to be really good. Was on the winners table in Dallas.

'Luscious Lucy', pb 2004 (Tucker)

The bushes are vigorous and the blooms keep getting better. It has a pretty color of cream edged in red/deep pink and pretty good form. The substance is, however, questionable.

'Memphis King' dr 2003 (Wells)

This is a vigorous grower that tends to sprawl. The deep velvet red blooms show good spiral form, but so far the stems have been spindly and incapable of holding the bloom upright. More time is needed.

'Peter Cottontail', w 2005 (Martin)

My miniflora sister seedling of Butter Cream makes large, often very large, white blooms, sometimes with pink in the center. The high-centered blooms are abundant, much less consistent in form than 'Butter Cream' and occasionally better. The bush is large, vigorous, upright and nearly impervious to disease, at least here in Arizona.

Conclusion

Well there you have it. We have a whole new crop of additional minis and minifloras that are still too new to say anything about and I've been studying the catalogues and reports to see what else we must have. But one thing is clear – there are a lot of nice new miniatures and minifloras that grow well in Arizona. Try some of these wonderful varieties and you won't be disappointed!