

# Rugosa Roses

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**Tough and trouble-free, rugosa roses offer a low-maintenance choice for challenging sites.**

In June, you may have noticed roses coming into their own with gorgeous blooms all over Skagit County. The range of rose varieties found around the world boggles the mind. For centuries, roses have been cultivated, propagated, hybridized and revered by flower-lovers worldwide. It is found growing wild in many countries in the Northern Hemisphere and is the basis for developing our modern-day rose hybrids.

Europe and the Orient are two areas where roses grow natively and where hybrids have been developed since earliest recorded history. There is nothing more wonderful than a perfect rose in summer. The heady fragrance coming from a perfectly formed bloom makes it clear why the rose is so popular.

To achieve the perfect rose, however, one must have perfect growing conditions and a great deal of time to tend it. Pruning, spraying, and fertilizing are necessary to keep the plant in tip-top condition. If you have ever grown roses, you know the problems that can occur: Diseases such as black spot and powdery mildew are common among roses, to say nothing of the insects that are attracted to a potential prize-winning rose bush.

One way to avoid some of these problems and still enjoy the beauty of roses is to invest in a rugosa rose. This rose, also called Japanese rose or Ramanas rose, is native to eastern Asia, in Northeastern China, Japan, Korea, and Southeastern Siberia, where it grows on the sea coast, often on sand dunes. It lends itself well to hybridizing with other roses and is valued by rose breeders for its resistance to diseases. It is tough and trouble-free, and needs little maintenance. That is why it may be just the plant to recommend to the gardener who loves roses but does not want the labor usually involved in rose cultivation.

The rugosa rose is no shrinking violet. It is a suckering shrub that forms new plants from the roots and can grow into dense thickets 4 to 6 feet high and wide. Some varieties can grow to 8 feet tall. The canes are covered with close-set, needle-like spines. The leaves are glossy green and have a wrinkled appearance, much like tissue paper that has been crumpled and then smoothed out. The flowers are sweet scented and the petals have that same wrinkled look. They come in shades of pink, rose, red-purple and white. The entire shrub has a rather shaggy or free spirited look. It is definitely not a candidate for a formal garden.

Taking care of this rose is easy. Its only requirement is good drainage. It will grow in salty conditions, shade or full sun, and in poor soil so long as it is well drained. Large blooms cover the plant in early summer and it continues to put out sporadic blooms all season until first frost. The blossoms develop into huge red or orange seed pods, called hips, which look like cherry

tomatoes. The plant is sometimes called beach tomato or sea tomato. The hips enhance the charm of this shrub, retaining their bright color until mid-winter. The leaves turn yellow or yellow-orange in the autumn, adding color to the fall garden.

Looking for a rose that practically dares you to damage it? A rugosa rose may be in your garden's future.

### **Best rugosa rose cultivars**

Looking for the top-performing rugosa rose varieties? Try these.

- Albo-plena Double: pure white flowers, low growing habit, high disease resistance, yellow-orange fall foliage and no hips
- Belle Poitevine: semi-double, mauve pink flowers, yellow-orange fall color, hips insignificant, high disease resistance
- Blanc Double de Coubert: similar to Albo-plena, but more vigorous, with double blooms
- Fru Dagmar Hastrup: silver-pink blossoms, good hip production, yellow to orange fall color, very high resistance to disease

If you have the space for this plant, you will be rewarded for many years to come with sweetly scented blooms and a ready supply of hips with which to make rose-hip jam, jelly, syrup and candies. Or try rose butter: Wrap a cube of butter with rose petals and seal in a container overnight. The next day, treat your friends by spreading it on bread and serving it with fresh rose petals, like a sandwich.