

GATHER

# Roses



GRACE ALEXANDER

EDT • 2022

# Content

/ p. 3 :

PREFACE

*Why it was always roses.*

/ p. 5 :

A STORY OF LOVE & MAGIC

*Why roses are special*

/ p. 7 :

BECCA'S FAVOURITE ROSES

/ p. 8 :

ROSES AS CUT FLOWERS

*Considerations for before & after.*

/ p. 10 :

GRACE'S FAVOURITES

/ p. 12 :

THE CONDITIONS FOR THRIVING

*How to make the most.*

/ p. 16 :

WHICH VARIETIES TO GROW.

*& how to decide.*

.

/ p. 20 :

UNDER-PLANTING & INTER-PLANTING

*Good housekeeping for roses.*

/ p. 22 :

SOURCES & STOCKISTS.

PREFACE

One of the first things I did as a novice flower farmer was to plant a trench full of David Austin roses. About thirty of them. I researched which varieties to choose endlessly although my choices had absolutely nothing to do with being practical for cutting. I just chose the ones that looked the most romantic and the most like David Austins - cupped and quartered, ruffled and rippled. And I have adored every single one since. Except Queen of Sweden, it was too straight-stemmed and too perfect and too pink. I gave that one away.

And so as soon as June came round, I knew that writing a guide to roses was the thing to do. And when I thought about who to ask, there could only be one person. Becca of The Garden Gate Flower Company knows her flowers and she certainly knows her roses. A huge thank you to her for this guide, as well as the recording of our rose themed chat, and her utterly exquisite (& useful) rose bowl tutorial.

*grace x*



## 01

## A STORY OF LOVE &amp; FLEETING MAGIC

*Grace: So what is so special about roses?*

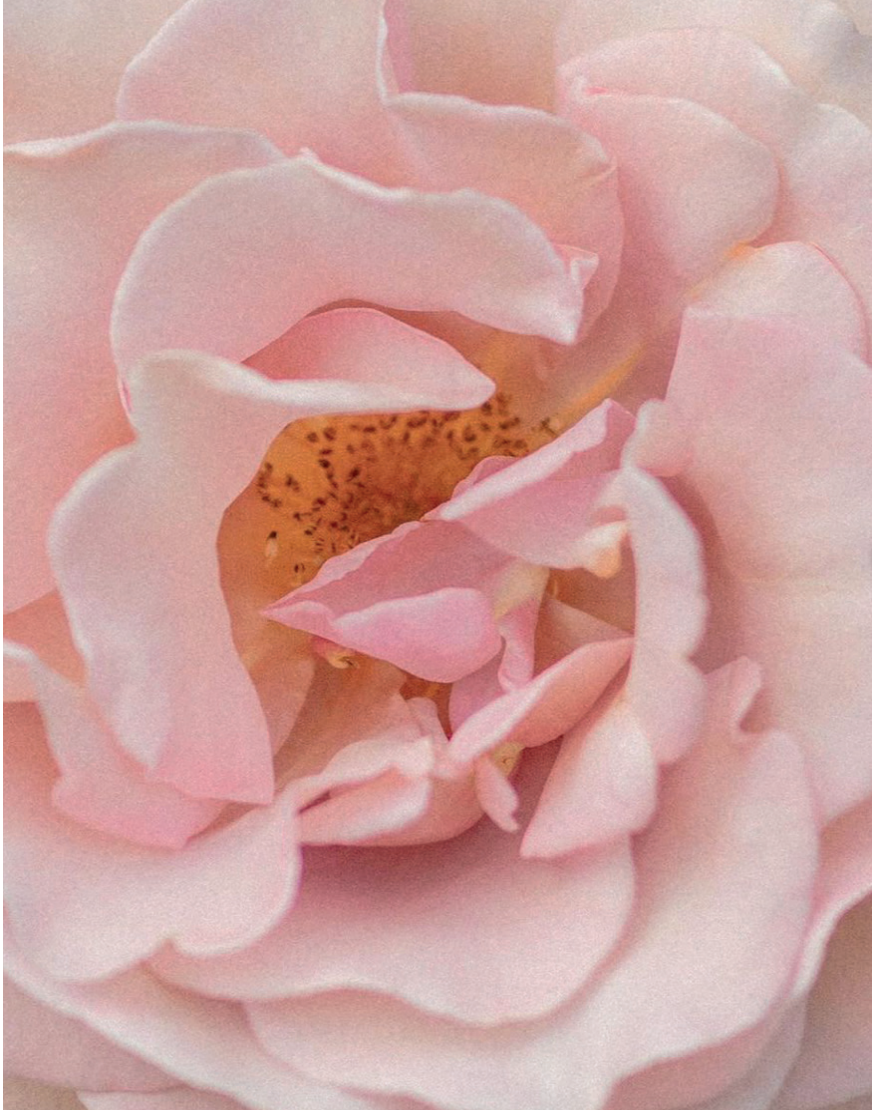
Becca: When Jose Villa [terribly terribly famous American, Fine Art photographer] came over, he contacted us about doing a shoot at the farm. Anytime anyone ever came to the farm to take a photograph, you could guarantee every petal would have dropped off. Or they would have come in winter and go, where are the flowers? And that tends to happen with magazines all the time. Where are the flowers in the middle of February? But I just remember him arriving and everything was flowering. Amazingly, not just flowering, perfect. The roses were like candy floss. The petals were just, oh, just incredible. And I remember just feeling so proud with armfuls and armfuls of these roses. I did feel like for one moment I had made it, and somebody was there to be able to capture that moment. So it will be a memory for me, for my whole career, and I know it sounds ridiculous, but it was so special and I'm very grateful to him that, he came and he captured it. I'll always carry the memory of those roses now.

*Grace: Do you think that is something adds to the magic*

*of roses is that they are fickle? I've had a very similar experience that I was about to do a workshop at Forde Abbey and I went out at five o'clock in the morning to cut and my row of David Austin's was just looking amazing. Then it just started to rain and it hammered with rain for about five minutes and wrecked every one that was ready to go. Just shattered. And that was the moment I decided I was going to sell seeds... But when roses are perfect, they are so perfect.*

*I love annuals. Annuals are great. They're sort of the Smarties at the seed world, grab a handful, you've got almost instant results and they're lovely and they're quick. But there is something about roses that I find is a lot more seductive because you really have to invest in them and nurture them. And you've got to engage them a bit more and it'll take a little while to get the best out of them. But when they're having their moment, just like you describe, there is nothing more perfect...*

Becca: That's funny because actually I never found roses really difficult. With annuals, there's all the rotting off, the sowing at the right time, the mice, the nibbling, the pinching them, then the over-watering and the under-watering and then the bolting... Roses are easy. It's quite basic; it's all about understanding your soil.



## *Becca's favourite roses...*

*Emily Bronte (pictured)*

*Port Sunlight*

*Jude the Obscure*

*Roald Dahl*

*Ghislaine de Feligonde*

*(rambler)*

*Koko loko*

## 02

## ROSES AS CUT FLOWERS

When you are thinking about roses at cut flowers, think about all the things that can happen before you cut them, and then all the things after.

**BEFORE:** pick the right varieties and, if you want really lovely blooms, a Spanish tunnel will work wonders. A Spanish tunnel is like a polytunnel but with open sides.

**AFTER:** Cut them early in the morning before they are fully open. Keep them cool.

Varieties that cut particularly well:

Princess Alexandra of Kent  
Chandos Beauty  
Irish Hope  
Duchess of Cornwall  
Just Joey  
Graham Thomas

Things to look for when considering roses:

Is it repeat flowering?  
Shrub, climber, or rambler?  
Final height?  
Is it scented?

Becca: I'm afraid with roses, you get as long as you get. One of the reasons I did wedding work was because I wanted to enjoy them in a bouquet, without the pressure of having that, 'oh, you can buy a bouquet from me for your kitchen table and they last five to seven days'. Roses simply don't last seven days. They last three days, *maybe* five days, depending what varieties you are growing. With David Austin's, you won't get much more than three days. And the I'm afraid that is just that there is nothing you can do really. I have to admit, I am rubbish with all that cutting and searing. But I also have enough flowers that I just think if that one doesn't last, then I'll just go and pick another one. Just grow more roses and cut them more often. They'll love it too, it's basically deadheading.

*Grace: And once you have cut them?*

Becca: Keep them cool. I have an aga in my kitchen and that's lethal for them.

*Grace: And I have no meaningful heating and very thick walls so my cottage is very cool. They last ages for me, but I always cut them late, the best time is when the sepals just turn back. Oh, and only cut them on a dry day.*





MARCH

p / 9

GRACE ALEXANDER

*Second vote for Jude the Obscure*

*Summer Song*

*Desdemona*

*Claire Austin*

*Lady of Shallot*

*William Morris*

*My least favourite? Hot chocolate. Gorgeous colour, lethal thorns.*

*Grace's favourite roses:*



## 03

## THE CONDITIONS FOR THRIVING

*Grace: I remember I visited your farm at Fowey about ten years ago when I was first starting out. I remember seeing your growing fields at the front of the farm stretching down to the sea. But then the second time when I came for the Forage and Feast it was just another level of beautiful. I remember when we first arrived, we drove up and we had tea and cake in the front room of the farmhouse and it was just so gorgeous. And then we had a tour of the farm and up to the right of the farm, there was a new field, which was roses as far as the eye could see. And it was just incredible.*

Becca: I think to have owned a garden is like that, even if it was only for a small amount of time, is so special. The thing was it was really difficult to actually do anything else other than just be in that space when it was full flower. I'd just go and stand in it and it was just unbelievable. We'd chosen a really good site for it as well without much planning. But we did think that the tree line would be a great windbreak. The front paddock was very exposed to the elements face the sea. It was not that far away from the sea, so salt spray, wind.

*Grace: A gorgeous view.*

Becca: My mum would always say you never get a view without wind. Where the roses were slightly up as gentle slope to the side of the house and slightly had a tree line around the edge and we put them away from the tree line but in their shelter, and just planted rows and rows and rows. I think we must have had five rows with at least, we had hundreds. The funny thing is when I started growing them in Cornwall everyone, honestly, everybody I spoke to asked 'Why are you growing roses? They don't grow in Cornwall.' I just kept thinking you know what? Even if I have to grow hundreds, I'm going to do it. That's why I grew so many, because I thought we'll have to grow hundreds to get what we need. We've got the land, so we'll do it...'

*Grace: Roses do hate being blown around, especially if they are being buffeted and they rock at the graft so windbreaks are crucial. Shelter however you can get it.*

Becca: You do need a bit of wind protection. They don't really want to be in a really exposed site. That's a reason why one should always have a walled garden to grow your roses in. Protection from the elements is key.



*Grace: So let's talk soil. I have lovely clay and roses adore it.*

Becca: I've grown roses on Bath heavy clay soil, to peaty loamy soil down here to, bog ordinary farmland. So I've grown on all types of soil. The main thing is that you really need to make sure when you plant them, you know what the conditions are they're going into; if they're going to heavy clay, you need to dig a bigger root, a bigger hole for them to go into in the first place. And enriching those beds constantly. The amount of money I spend on compost and mulch for roses is terrifying quite frankly. But I find that helps with pests. If you feed them really well from the base, they do better at the top.

The other thing that really helps with pests and disease is good housekeeping, making sure that they are clean around the base of the roses, because quite often that's where disease will drop spores. And that's where you get the black spot bits and pieces like that, so they do love your tidy bedroom.

*Grace: Oh God, I've got cleavers around the bottom of mine at the moment. I need to go weeding between roses. It is my least favourite job because you have to put a Barbour jacket on just to get between them. There is nothing worse than extricating yourself from between the roses that are catching on your jumper and in your hair. Of course you need to understand what your soil is. But if you came to me and said, I've got really sandy soil for my roses, what should I do? I've got really heavy clay, what should I do. I'm going to give the same answer to all of the soil questions, which is mulch as much as you can with really good compost.*

Becca: Throw it on, just throw it on and let it do its thing. If you haven't got the energy of the time, just chuck it on over and leave it. And, but it needs that now in the spring, and it needs again in autumn. So it's almost a double mulch. You *cannot* mulch too much.



## 04

## WHICH VARIETIES TO GROW

*Grace: So... what's the difference between a shrub rose, a climber, a Rambler?*

Becca: I personally think that Claire Austin is a cheat. She's sold as a shrub rose, but she is definitely a very bendy climber. I think it's quite misleading to sell it as a shrub. Actually, it really needs to be like a very small climber.

*Grace: I love Claire Austin by the way. It is so cupped. I adore that about it.*

Becca: It is so bendy though, so the flowers face the wrong way, they face down. You have to lie on the ground just look at it.

*Grace: When I was at Damson Farm last week and we were learning about rose hazel domes and the bit that I really want to think about is varieties will really suit a rose dome. What you say about Claire Austin makes me think that it would be perfect. The demonstration dome that Alison had was covered in a Lark Ascending. The important thing is that it shoots everywhere, so I need some of those ones that are actually acting like climbers.*

Becca: Yes, it definitely does that. The difference between a climber and a shrub

and a Rambler is your shrub is like, imagine an ornamental rose garden. Lovely. You can get all the different varieties or different shapes or sizes or different colors, knock yourself out. Some of them work really well as hedging. You get the lovely ones with hips, like the Rosa rugosa, which are fabulous, great for wildlife. And then there are the climbers. I have to say I'm a big fan of climbers. And if I had more space for climbers, I would use them because I have a beautiful one called Mme Alfred Carriere, which was meant to be New Dawn. So when I bought this house 15 years ago, my mum had a New Dawn on the farm house and it was beautiful. That's lovely, pale pink, really pretty. I went and bought one, it starts to flower and it's absolutely not a New Dawn. Actually, it was the best accident, I wrote to David Austin, I don't think they make those mistakes so much any more, but fifteen years ago... And it is a monster of a rose now. I like that the stem is thing at the front of the cottage and it climbs up and goes all the way across the front of the house underneath the bedroom windows.

I quite love climbers because they're quite





manageable. You need to definitely prune it hard. Where it, where you've chosen it to be, and you can shape it a little bit.

Generally speaking, ramblers are big and ramblers, you don't prune. You might give it a little bit of a very light prune. If you have it coming to the path and you're going to scratch your eyes, but generally speaking, you just let it do what it wants to. And I'll never forget going to Arnie Maynard's and seeing ramblers planted in all the bases of the trees. He used trees as climbing frames for Ramblers. And I remember years ago when I was growing up, there was a little one way street near where I live and I remember thinking, what is that in that tree? isn't It just doesn't look right... And basically it was a tree that had been allowed to have a rose grown through it, but they actually did cut it so that it did actually look like a flowering tree. And that was amazing.

*Grace: How big a tree do you need for a Rambler? Surely it's quite an old big tree.*

Becca: You need something that's a fairly good size, but if you get it in, when the trees are established. You don't want to get it in when the tree is brand new; I would say a five, six year old tree, and I would happily put a Rambling Rector in it and just let them grow together. When I've seen them before, I think Arne even had more than one growing in some of the bigger trees and they will just make their way up. I've got a small garden though so putting a rambler in a tree is not particularly practical. Yeah. So that's why I put climbers in. For my space, a climber is actually a better alternative, 100% putting a rose in and strapping it around the tree and letting it work its way up. It's definitely worth doing.

*Grace: We do have lots of fruit trees, but I do have a big native hedge and I was wondering about putting in some ramblers every few metres and then just let them go through the hedge.*

Becca: My mum had that at the farm, we had been going through the hedge. Beautiful.



## 05

## UNDER-PLANTING &amp; INTER-PLANTING

Becca: Growing roses is (like so many things) is about understanding your soil but also, the one thing you do need with roses is space. But if you go back to all Victorian times, they would have grown roses very much on their own. They, they would have had a rose garden or very formal. And even if you go to lovely David Austin, their roses are grown very much on their own with space around them.

*Grace: So when I did my first bed of David Austin's. I planted them very close together. I had one bed four metres by a metre and I crammed them all in. And I probably had 30 roses in a block. I wouldn't do a block again because I couldn't get to the middle one, but it was amazing. They just grow up and up, and then burst into bloom and were just wonderful.*

Becca: With space, I'm talking about keeping them separate from annuals, biennials.

Sometimes it's the benefit of having single variety beds is you can treat it all the same, it's really easy. You can go up to a rose bed and go, we're going to do 'this and this' today. With mixed planting, I can't get in there because I've got seedlings around here.

If I cut this off, it's that supporting that. But because of the lack of space, I will be doing a little bit of a trial back again to see whether what I can plant in between the roses.

Recommendations for plants that will thrive alongside roses:



*David Austin roses*

*The Cornish Rose Company*

*Pococks*

*Sources for roses:*

