



Better Together— Good combinations make rose gardens sustainable

September 2009 “In the Garden” from the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum
Podcast and web video at arboretum.unl.edu

A traditional rose garden can intimidate even the most seasoned gardener with the required fertilizing, pruning, spraying and winterizing. But newer, hardier varieties of roses—Knockout, Drift, Carefree, ‘Easy going’™ roses—are much less demanding. Combined with ornamental grasses, perennials and flowering shrubs, a rose garden may be just as easy to manage as any perennial border.

One of the primary considerations is the width of the planting bed, according to Luann Finke of Finke Gardens & Nursery. Most roses are about 4’ in height and spread, about the width of many perennial beds or borders. “It’s difficult to have effective plant combinations or create any sense of flow when there’s only space for one plant,” said Finke. She recommends borders that are 9-10’ in width to allow space for small plants in the foreground and larger grasses or shrubs in the background.

The wider space allows for a slightly bermed area that elevates the roses and shelters smaller edging plants, creating a milder microclimate, extending seasonal interest and providing a much more varied landscape.

Roses don’t vary much in size and or season of interest. Shifting the scale with smaller, finely textured groundcovers in the front and arching or vertical shrubs or grasses can make a tremendous difference. Thinking in terms of perspective is essential in any landscape design, according to Finke. How does it look from inside the house, from an upstairs window, from a patio, sidewalk or driveway? A wider bed can make planting beds appealing from a variety of viewpoints.

For areas that will be viewed from close-up, finely-textured plants and subtle colors are effective. Even just two or three plants can create an effective mix, and large shrubs or grasses in the background can frame the view and give the space more structure. Finke recommends native plants for areas that can hold their own all year long and require a minimum of care.

Transitions are important. Spaces around buildings or patios tend to be more formal and linear and areas farther out larger and less manicured. Varying the plants from tidy, compact species to more free-flowing ones, from subtle colors to more dramatic ones, or from fine-textured to large, bold foliage, can result in that inexplicable sense of rightness a well-designed space provides.

Paying attention to each plant’s characteristics can also help determine good transitions and combinations: foliage texture, stem color, color of flower bud and of spent petals, spring and fall foliage, growth habit—upright, arching, spreading.

There are so many plants to choose from and endless combinations to try, Finke said. “That’s the beauty of public gardens like the new Strolling Garden in central Lincoln. You can see what you like and what works before trying things in your own yard.”

Effective Combinations

Small grouping with subtle colors and silvery, fine-textured foliage: Pink Gnome rose, Russian sage, Kit Cat catmint, Helen Von Stein lambs’ ear.

Dramatic, stronger-colored flowers and foliage and contrasting growth habits: Red Velvet yarrow, Rosy Returns daylily, Husker Red penstemon, National Arboretum fountain grass, Purple Emperor sedum, Gold Bar maidengrass, Salmon Impression rose.

Strong yellows and greens in a variety of forms: *Patrinia*, My Antonia aster, goldenrod, yarrow, butterfly bush, Yellow Submarine rose.

Plants with similar flower colors but different textures and habits: soft shell pink of Bonica rose with southernwood (*Artemisia abrotanum*), lambs' ear, butterfly bush, aster, plumed salvia, Caramel coral bells.

Large, dramatic plants and strong colors in this hardy, drought-tolerant planting (not for a small space or timid gardener!): Purple Pavement rugosa rose, fleecflower, *Amsonia*, Joe Pye weed, Northwind switchgrass, sideoats grama, Fireworks goldenrod, My Antonia and Stokes aster, coral bells, Purple Emperor sedum, yucca, butterfly bush, coneflower, purple poppy mallow and sedum.

In Lincoln

“An Evening with Roses & Gardeners” Tuesday, September 8 at 6:30 p.m.
27th and Capitol Parkway (east of Sunken Gardens and north of Hamann Rose Garden)
No charge or registration; rain date is September 15.

Learn more about beautiful plant combinations for your landscape with a visit to the Rotary Strolling Garden. Horticulturists and landscape designers will be on hand to discuss design considerations and plant combinations for easy-to-maintain landscapes with spectacular color displays. Over 50 different kinds of shrub roses and hundreds of perennials and ornamental grasses are on display.

The evening is sponsored by Finke Gardens & Nursery, which contributed most of the roses and also helped design and develop the strolling rose garden with Mark Canney, Alice Reed and Lincoln Parks and Recreation Horticulture staff.

“We’ve seen a strong interest in the use of landscape roses, and yet the vast majority of people aren’t sure how to integrate them in their home landscape. Roses aren’t just for rose gardens, and this beautiful public planting is an excellent example of how they can be used with perennials, flowering shrubs and ornamental grasses” said Luann Finke. “Until you see how they grow, and how the colors actually develop in a Lincoln setting, it’s impossible to know for sure that you’re going to like the effect.”

Finke recommends visiting the garden regularly to see how it changes through the year. For more information go to www.finkegardens.com or parks.lincoln.ne.gov, call Finkes at 402/466-1995 or Canney at 441-8248, or view a podcast at arboretum.unl.edu.