

Stop and Smell the Roses

When I worked at a garden center one of the questions many customers would ask is, “what do you guys do to stay busy in the winter?” Although retail sales slow down, there is actually much to do to prepare for the coming spring. Many retail areas are remodeled, office space may be added, and greenhouses are improved or constructed. However, one thing that I particularly enjoyed during the “slow time” was seeing new varieties of plants in catalogs that had not been available before. Although I did not directly order the plants for the coming year, I avidly anticipated seeing the new varieties and especially the roses.

The ordered roses would finally arrive in early February. I remember, somewhat fondly, helping in trimming and planting them. After planting into pots, they would then be placed in a greenhouse and carefully managed to maximize growth and to time peak bloom for the spring season. This involved careful temperature regulation, pruning several times, and a number of applications of various types of fertilizer. As anyone who has ever pruned and cared for roses can imagine, you do not come away uninjured when working with them due to the copious amounts of thorns. It was always amazing though, and required some faith on my part to trust that the plants would actually grow after all that had happened to them. I was always heartened to see the first leaves emerge a couple of weeks after being placed in the greenhouse. I also always enjoyed watching for the first blossoms of the season. These would be trimmed to encourage further plant growth, but someone was always the beneficiary of these flowers. Several employees would travel to the “rose-house” on a regular basis and cut fresh flowers to bring home to their wives and loved ones.

Starting in March many customers would start calling and asking if the roses were ready for purchase. We would have to turn them away until later in the spring. At or near Mother’s Day, the weather would finally warm enough so that the roses could finally be placed outdoors. Most were in full bloom with especially large blossoms and were especially stunning due to the extra care they had received. Due to their beauty, the roses were a popular gift for Mother’s Day. Husbands and sons would try to find the perfect one for their bride or mother, sometimes spending hours doing so. Many customers would also hunt for a particular variety to complement or complete a collection. It was always fun to watch and also to help the customers with their needs.

Roses that have already been planted in the landscape will begin to bloom within the next month or so. I also always look forward to viewing their beauty. During this time, I try to travel to my grandfather’s house. He is an avid rosarian, and has filled almost every available space in his flower beds with different types of roses. Some he has cultivated for twenty to thirty years. Others may be

removed in a short period of time due to poor performance. I have learned more about roses from him than any book, and still seek his advice and knowledge to this day. As you travel about, really do stop and smell the roses. You will find that many actually do not have a scent, but it is still worth the effort.