

Rose Exhibiting for Beginners

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So - the rose bug has bit you! You have learned about planting, pruning and spraying! Now you are ready to exhibit!

If possible, attend a rose show and visit the preparation room where you can watch the exhibitors at work before you exhibit yourself. Most exhibitors are usually pretty busy during this time, so be sensitive about asking questions. Take mental notes and ask them about their exhibiting techniques after their entries are placed into the show. Volunteer to clerk (no previous experience required) in order to learn how rose shows are set up and how the judges work. Obtain a copy of the ARS Guidelines for Judging Roses and read it.

For your first show, choose one fairly close to home and one that offers some Novice Classes. You are not limited to novice status, but you might feel more comfortable starting there. Obtain a copy of the show schedule and read it. Decide which classes you might like to enter. Limit your number of entries to allow yourself enough time to give each rose your attention. You can take more than one rose to the show per class, and at the last minute, decide which one to enter.

ONE MONTH BEFORE THE SHOW

Start watching your roses for potential exhibition specimens. If you plan to exhibit a single bloom on a stem, you will need a strong, straight stem that has been disbudded as it developed. Disbudding is the process of removing all side buds that form between the stem and the axil of the leaf. This allows all the energy to go to the terminal bud. Eventually you might want to stake the cane with a bamboo stick and some twist ties. Be sure to keep the tip of the stake just under the bloom. Staking protects the cane from snapping off in the wind and prevents leaf tearing on thorns from nearby canes.

If you plan to show a floribunda spray, you will want to remove the center (largest) bud at the point of emergence from the stem. This allows the side buds to develop and fill in the hole where that first bloom would have been if allowed to develop. That center bloom would have developed first and been finished by the time the rest of the spray was in exhibition form. Removing it at that time would have left the hole.

Water your bushes regularly and keep up your spraying schedule!

Prepare a grooming kit which you will use the day of the show. Get a small plastic or metal case and gather together the following items:

- Soft clean cloths (hotel shoe shine cloths are great)
- A package of Q-tips
- Tweezers
- Small sharp scissors
- Small camel-hair brush

- Several sheets of aluminum foil and/or plastic wrap
- Return address labels
- An ARS Handbook for Selecting Roses and ARS Exhibition Names
- If possible, some exhibiting tags with rubber bands that you picked up at a previous show or local society meeting

ONE WEEK BEFORE THE SHOW

Watch the blooms that are starting to open and have show potential. Protect them from night dew by covering with a plastic baggy and twist tie gently below the bloom. This should be done in the evening and removed before the sun shines on the bloom and heats the air inside the bag.

2-3 DAYS BEFORE THE SHOW

When do you cut the rose? The timing varies depending on the variety of the rose, the number of petals, the temperature and general weather conditions and your ability to store the cut roses.

Roses should be cut 1/4 - 1/3 open which allows them time to open more on the morning of the show. Cut them early in the morning if possible or late in the evening. Cut the stem a little longer than the 7:1 ratio (the stem should be 7 times longer than the height of the bloom) to allow for recutting later.

Cut the stem at an angle with sharp, clean pruners and immediately take it to your preparation area. A laundry tub works great! Have some tall, white plastic buckets available which you can usually obtain from a bakery or a sandwich shop. In one bucket put a flower preservative mixture, such as Floralife®[®], and cold water up to 3-4 inches. Fill another bucket to the top with tepid water. Bring the roses in from the garden, one or two at a time to prevent them from snagging one another. Submerge the rose stem in the full bucket, recut the stem and then lower it into the water so the water comes up just below the bloom. Allow the roses to rest in the tepid water and drink their fill, but watch the blossoms carefully. If you see a bloom start to open, place it in the cold water that contains the preservative immediately. After an hour or two, move any remaining roses to the cool water bucket and put in a cool dark place. If you place your rose bucket in a refrigerator, be sure to put a baggy on the blooms so they do not lose moisture from the petals. If you cut the night before the show, you probably will not need to refrigerate.

THE MORNING OF THE SHOW

Rise early. Remove the roses from the refrigerator and take one last walk through the garden for another possible entry. Pack up your roses and your grooming box and head for the show. Plan to arrive early so you can get table space and your favorite doughnut! Register, if required, and gather enough vases for your roses. If you plan to enter a rose in a bowl (you do not need a good stem for this), check ahead of time to see if you need to bring your own bowl or use one supplied by the show committee.

Place each rose in a bud vase and evaluate the bloom stage. If the bloom is too tight, carefully insert Q-tips between the petals to encourage opening. Take note of the temperature in the room and check if any sunlight is shining in on your roses. Warmth will hasten the opening. Sometimes, the air conditioning is so low, you have to remove the rose to another location to warm it up. I once put a rose in my car which was parked in the sun. Guess who showed an open bloom? You have to use your own judgment. A lot of knowing what to do comes with trial and error and experience.

Support each leaf from behind with your fingers, and polish the surface with a soft cloth. During this time, watch your blooms for any adjustments they might need. Carefully remove any guard petals (those small petals on the very outside that protected the bud) that have color faults or are smaller than the outer ring of petals. If an outer petal is hanging low, you can raise it by carefully lifting it so it rests on the petals next to it. Use your brush to remove any fine debris from the petals and use the scissors to trim any brown or torn edges from the petals or leaves. Check the proportion of the bloom to the stem. You can adjust this somewhat by pushing the stem deeper into the vase or wedging it with rolled up plastic wrap or foil. Be sure the stem is in the water and the wedging material is not showing above the top of the vase.

Fill out the exhibitors' entry tags, if you haven't already done so. Use your ARS Handbook to check rose names and the proper spellings. Use your address labels to save writing all that information on each tag. Attach your entry tags to the vase and make one final check of the overall appearance. Set the vase on the floor and look down on the entire entry. If you need to adjust or trim, this is your last chance. Place your entries on the exhibition table, one at a time if possible. Immediately clean up your work space. Return any unused vases and wipe up any water. Secure your personal belongings and go find some fellow rosarians to enjoy a hearty breakfast and rose talk!

Good luck!