

Gertrude Jekyll

If we were sitting with David Austin, having a spot of tea, and he remarked that he could not think of any other rose with quite so strong a fragrance as 'Gertrude Jekyll', I should rather think we would take note.

Indeed, 'Gertrude Jekyll' is one of the best and most popular of David Austin's many creations. The rose is classified as a shrub, a cross between the English rose 'Wife of Bath' and the old Portland rose 'Comte de Chambord'. A rich, dark pink, pale crimson at the center, fading to palest pink at the edge. The scent is very strong, and it repeats well.

We had only ordered one 'Gertrude Jekyll' for our Rose Garden, but due to a mixed up with our supplier, instead we received four. And we'll be hard pressed to decide if we will replace any of them come next winter. 'Gertrude Jekyll' is an immensely vigorous rose and can quickly grow to ten feet. Already canes are venturing beyond the protection of our iron fencing; an invitation to the resident deer population to assist us in pruning and deadheading.

David Austin named 'Gertrude Jekyll' (rhymes with "treacle") to commemorate the contributions of the English writer and garden designer who was born in London in 1843. Jekyll lived most of her life at her garden, Munstead Wood, near Surrey. In her book, "Home and Garden" (1900), she describes making potpourri, "over many months, gathering rose petals, bushels of them at once, as many as 11,000 rose blooms, picked early in the morning as soon as the dew had evaporated."

Graham Stuart Thomas writes in the 1983 reprint of Jekyll's book, "Roses," that she "was not interested in just growing roses, but using them to create garden pictures. She sought to bring into the limelight again the old shrub roses that were clear coloring, and give the greatest grace and beauty from falling spray as opposed to today's preference for stiff upright bushes."

If you are to have but a handful of English roses, for certain, 'Gertrude Jekyll' should be one of them.

By Gary Scales

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