

Roses Without Chemicals

By Peter E. Kukielski

What a breath of fresh air it was to find a rose book that focuses on growing roses using sustainable methods! Our beloved flower has the reputation for needing oodles of care and lots of chemicals to look half-way decent. While I know that not to be the case since I tossed out the heavy-duty spray equipment and fertilizers years ago, it's not something that until now, has been as well said as it is in *Roses without Chemicals* by Peter Kukielski.

Peter is the former curator of Peggy Rockefeller Rose Garden at the New York Botanical Garden. Beginning in 2007 he managed a renovation of the garden with the goal of having a beautiful rose garden filled with disease resistant plants and maintained using sustainable methods. The Garden now features more than 650 varieties including heirloom varieties selected for their intoxicating perfumes and modern selections chosen for their resistance to disease and pests as well as their beauty. Having visited the garden a few years ago, I can attest to its magnificence!

The book opens with a chapter entitled "The new millennial rose garden." The author defines this type of garden as one with "varieties that are fragrant, beautiful, disease-free, chemical-free, relatively maintenance-free and regionally appropriate." He uses the year 2000 as a turning point when growers, breeders and curators began to shift their way of thinking about roses and move in the direction of more "green" and sustainable roses.

The section on "Growing roses sustainably" features easy to read guidance on buying roses, what plants need, planting, pruning, feeding your soil, and of course, pests and disease. The heart of the book is the chapter on "The chemical-free rose directory: 150 disease-resistant roses." A full page is devoted to each rose with gorgeous photographs, the hybridizer and when the rose was put onto the market, good companion plants, and a numerical rating for each. Varieties are rated for disease resistance, bloom (quantity and quality), fragrance and overall. The author notes that the roses described in the book "have been proven in my experience to have the genes to resist disease and fit into a sustainable, chemical-free garden." The final section of the book is on roses by class, habit and color; it's a helpful aid in finding the right plant for the right place in your garden.

Overall, I'd say this is an excellent resource for beginners as well as seasoned rose growers for its emphasis and information on "green" growing methods and as a shopping guide for finding plants that will resist disease. The only drawback is availability of the roses described to the home gardener. A quick count found that only ~60% of the 150 disease resistant roses listed in the book are included in the American Rose Society Handbook for Selecting Roses. Many are hybridized in Europe and may not have made it yet to mainstream American markets. Of the eight roses recommended for the western part of the U.S., only one variety, 'Julia Child' is widely available; the other seven have limited availability in the U.S. Makes me want to start importing roses!

Review by Nanette Londeree, Master Rosarian

