

# **Cutting Your Roses...On Your Way To Winning**

## **By: Richard Anthony & Kristine Vance**

There have been numerous articles written regarding the optimal time of the day to cut a rose in anticipation of a pending rose show. There are also various opinions regarding this very subject matter, some of which have vast amounts of data from scientific research with empirical evidence supporting the contentions. Many exhibitors favor early morning hours as in theory the rose should be fully hydrated. Other rosarians favor dusk as the optimum time to cut roses due to the sugar content in the stems being the highest, which in theory will result in the rose keeping somewhat longer. So just when is the best time to cut a rose for the exhibitor? There is no precise or definitive answer other than it all depends on a multitude of variables. Come on, you knew the answer was not going to be simple! It depends on what day of the week it is, how many petals the rose has, does the rose continue to open after it is cut... not to mention how well does the rose refrigerate and on and on and on. Knowing your rose will aid in your decision as to when it should be cut; **one half to three quarters** open is the norm, depending on the rose.

For a local rose show more often than not many exhibitors are not overly concerned what time of the day a rose is cut. Frequently toward the end of the week we actually will cut many roses at or around lunch time. Is this the perfect time to cut a rose? Obviously, the answer is **NO** but it sure beats losing a rose if it is not cut. The consideration when cutting during the heat of the day is and should be one of how **close to perfection** is the rose. Other variables that impact your decision to cut are temperature, anticipated rain and sun. Hot days that are 80 plus degrees or warmer will cause a rose to move much faster than if it is 70 degrees or less. If it is going to rain in the early afternoon or evening, better to cut a rose and let it open inside than to risk losing it if a heavy rain is forecast. Gray overcast days with a cooler temperature, especially in the fall, will cause a bloom to languish at close to same position of openness for an inordinate amount of time. Our suggestion when this occurs is to cut the rose (assuming it is close to one half open) and let it open inside. Very warm tap water that is changed frequently will aid in opening the rose as will placement by a window that has sun shining through.

As you are walking your garden and you find a bloom worthy of consideration for the rose show, cut the bloom very carefully. Pay particular attention to the length of the stem. Our suggestion for Hybrid Teas is **24 to 28** inches in length, Minifloras **12 to 16** inches in length and Miniatures should be cut about **8 to 12** inches in length. We cut as indicated for two reasons; one is that we anticipate re-cutting perhaps one to three times before the rose is entered and more importantly it is very easy to reduce the length of a cane that is too long but we have yet to find a satisfactory way to lengthen a cane other than using nitrogen at the beginning of a bloom cycle. We angle our cuts at 45 degrees in order to have a slightly larger surface area, which in most instances will aid in avoiding potential

blockages. That is of course assuming you have added Chrysal, bleach or lemon juice to your water. Care or some consideration should be given to the bush that you are cutting a rose from. We have won Queen with Hybrid Teas that were planted in the early spring but as a general rule we do not take cuttings until the bush has begun to mature. This applies to all roses especially rooted cuttings of Miniatures and Minifloras.

Once we cut the rose we immediately place it in a plastic sleeve which is inserted in a bucket (waste basket) of very warm tap water (**about 85 degrees**). We hydrate (**harden off**) our roses for about a half an hour or longer and if we have time we clean our leaves and may do some preliminary grooming prior to placing the cut roses in our cooler. As with most things rose related, there are several theories regarding conditioning or harden off your roses. Some exhibitors are concerned with temperature where others are concerned with the amount of time a rose is hydrated. Other exhibitors are concerned with the depth of the water which ranges from about six inches at minimum up to roses being placed in water up to the peduncle. What is the correct method? This is another it all depends. In essence what we are attempting to accomplish is to have our roses become completely **turgid** or as full of water as possible as a fully hydrated roses will retain or maintain freshness (**substance**) a lot longer than a rose that has not been hydrated properly or completely.

Another area of difference of opinion is **re-cutting your rose under water**. Does it make a difference? Many exhibitors swear by the procedure and others do not. Personally, we do not subscribe to the philosophy of re-cutting under water (exception is dry wrapped roses) but definitely do advocate re-cutting roses that are in the cooler every other day and re-cutting all roses at the rose show just prior to inserting them into a vase. The reason we do not re-cut under water is that the stem has to be removed from the water and is subject to blockage from an air bubble when it is out of water so in our opinion re-cutting under water is a waste of time. But, blockages do occur whether it is from **bacteria** at the end of a stem or from an **air bubble**. We have lost a queen on more than one occasion and nearly lost one last year at the District show in Lancaster due to a blockage. Sometimes when a blockage first occurs you cannot detect this **visually** but almost always you can **feel the loss of substance** in the petals with your fingers. When this happens, our suggestions are to immediately re-cut the rose and then place it in very warm tap water. If you catch it in time, the rose will rehydrate quickly and may actually improve a too tight of a bloom which is what happened to us last year.

If you have read Bob Martin's fabulous book "**Showing Good Roses**", he advocates maintaining water in your refrigerator/cooler in order to keep the humidity level between 60 and 80 percent this will retain bloom substance. We do not add extra water as our large roses are stored in four sizable plastic waste baskets and the smaller roses are kept in 16 ounce plastic cups all of which are filled with water. What we attempt to do is to minimize the amount of time the cooler doors are open in order not to lose humidity. He also advocates keeping the **cooler as dark** as possible suggesting that sugar and starch will decrease which in theory is correct when roses are subjected to light. We advocate maintaining a **grow light** in the cooler in order to maintain the natural color of the rose and have found that centers tend to elongate when paced in close proximity to the light.

Our last thought regarding cutting your roses is in most instances, the Queen of Show is more often than not cut the morning of or the day prior to the rose show. Our cutting typically will begin in earnest late Wednesday afternoon or early evening and continue right up until dark on Friday unless we can cut Saturday morning and still make it to the show on time. On occasion with a few varieties that tend to hold forever such as '**Moonstone**', '**Whirlaway**' and '**Class of 73**', we will cut as much as a week before a show with excellent results. Just remember that this is the exception not the rule of thumb. As always, if you have questions or comments about this or other articles that we have written, please direct your comments to Richard at [RJA4CPA@aol.com](mailto:RJA4CPA@aol.com) or Kristine at [Beancntr30@wideopenwest.com](mailto:Beancntr30@wideopenwest.com)