

## BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham

"2012 Herb of the Year: THE ROSE"

Wild roses, ancestors of our current varieties, flourished on earth before humans appeared. The rose is one of the oldest flowers in cultivation, and it has been treasured throughout the centuries not only for its beauty but also for its culinary and medicinal uses. Rose petals can be crystallized or used fresh in salads and desserts. The rose fruits (hips) are an excellent source of natural vitamin C and are made into teas and syrups. In classical medicine, roses have been used to cure eye, ear, and mouth irritations, headaches, and toothaches as well as diseases of the lung, stomach, intestinal tract, sleeplessness, and excessive perspiration.\* Its designation as the 2012 Herb of the Year is well deserved.

The roses that are most frequently planted in the herb garden come from the "Old Rose" category. These are roses in cultivation prior to 1867, before the introduction of the hybrid tea roses. "Old Roses" such as the Damask, the Cabbage, and the Sweet Brier are extremely fragrant and blend in beautifully with the sweet-scented herbs. They are more resistant to diseases and pests than the modern hybrids and therefore do not require applications of poisons that would render them unfit for human consumption. In addition, these roses require very little pruning. The annual-flowering varieties should be pruned after they have bloomed, but the ever blooming ones require pruning only to remove weak or dead growth. Another desirable feature, especially for those of us gardening in the Central Texas area, is their tolerance for heat and drought.

The Classes of "Old Roses":

1. The Gallicas: The ancient rose, *Rosa gallica*, was the ancestor of all our modern garden roses. Found within this group are the "Apothecary Rose", the "Empress Josephine", and "Rosa Mundi" which was used for making rose candy, syrup, and preserves.

2. The Damasks: These roses are a cross between the Gallicas and a species native to the Mediterranean. The resulting group became known as Damask. These roses gently sprawl, and grow up to 4 feet high. The double blooms are shades of pink and white.

3. The Centifolias, also known as Cabbage Roses, are a cross between the Gallicas and the European *R. Alba*. They have very large double blooms.

4. One group of "Old Roses" resulted from the discovery, collection, and crossing of a China Rose and a Damask Rose. The resulting strain came to be called the Bourbons.

The "Old Rose" additions to your garden will bring years of easy-care beauty and delight.

If you would like to learn more about the roses in your garden, try [Legends & Lore of Texas Wildflowers](#) by Elizabeth Silverthorne and [Southern Herb Growing](#) by Madalene Hill & Gwen Barclay with Jean Hardy. Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact [ask.bcmga@gmail.com](mailto:ask.bcmga@gmail.com)

