

Calendar

Badgered for Buds

Rose-Pruning Demonstration

Cut something down to make it grow stronger? That's the paradoxical rose, all right, a woody ornamental whose blooms come with thorns.

"I was exposed to roses, growing up in Pasadena," says Richard Streeper. But he didn't become passionate about them until he was in law school, in Oregon. "I was collecting seeds and trying to germinate them, without success. A couple of years later, after settling in El Cajon, I tried breeding them again." In 1965, he attended a rose show in Balboa Park. "I joined the San Diego Rose Society, the American

LOCAL EVENTS

Rose Society, and the Royal National Rose

Society all in one year."

He quickly moved up the ranks of the local organization: in four years, he was its president.

San Diego had no public rose garden at the time, although there had been one from 1915 to 1921. "There was a really nice garden in Balboa Park, during the first Exposition. It was over where the lawn-bowling green is today — in that very spot. But it developed a problem. People were spreading cremated ashes there, and [superintendent of parks] John Morley, for whom Morley Field is named, didn't like it."

Morley's solution was, first, to move the garden. Streeper isn't clear on the rest of Morley's plan. "Anyway, they plowed it up." They intended to plant another garden close by and marked some trees for felling. "But people protested about cutting down any trees in the park. And then we had the Great Depression, and that was the end of it" — at least until decades later, when Streeper came along.

"The society sent a resolution to the city council in 1969, supporting establishment of a municipal rose garden in Balboa Park. And nobody would say they were against it, so the city did adopt the resolution." But nobody did anything to implement it.

In those days, Streeper had his law office in the same building as the civilian head of the park board. Every day for a year he buttonholed and badgered him. "I finally wore him down" and got the city to cooperate.



Richard Streeper in Balboa Park's rose garden

Through a friend, he made another important contact, with the Parker Foundation. "They gave \$100,000 of seed money" — literally.

The result is that favorite of wedding-photo parties, the Inez Grant Parker Memorial Rose Garden. South of the footbridge that crosses Park Boulevard, near the Natural History Museum, it contains roughly 2400 rose bushes in 180 varieties.

"The numbers are elusive. Things get dug up and replanted constantly, because new varieties are always coming onto the market. We get about

six new varieties from [commercial] introducers every year, and the garden has no room to expand, so we remove plants that aren't so good. This is not an antique or historical rose collection, but rather an exhibition of roses that grow well in San Diego. If they don't grow well, they're eliminated."

So how does one guard a rose garden from would-be ash-spreaders or just garden-variety thieves? A deterrent was worked into the design. "The curb is painted red, and since no one parks there, you have an unobstructed view, which helps a lot.

We do lose some every year — one to two dozen. But the society has a rose-garden trust, some of which is used to buy replacements for stolen plants. People also clip them, that's true. And it's an irritation, but not a major problem, because we tend to grow flowers in clusters and not one bloom on a long stem. They're not the sort of things that would be attractive as a florist rose."

Many San Diegans know Streeper's garden column on Sundays in the *Union-Tribune*. His words about roses appear in other places, too, including *The Rose*, published in Great Britain by the Royal National Rose Society.

"Nothing is more puzzling or intimidating to most rose growers than winter pruning," he has written. One thing he recommends is spending time observing "the growth characteristics" of roses. He promises that a practiced observer will be able to pick out older canes from newer ones as easily as we all distinguish a 10-year-old person from a 20-year-old.

Beyond that, it's difficult to give general rules. "You need to know why you're doing it. Once you understand that, it becomes immensely easier. You also need to get in there and do some pruning, yourself." This works best after you've watched someone else do it. In that way, it sounds like learning to knead bread. "Or make pie crust," he agrees. "You could write on that subject all day. But if all somebody did was read the instructions, it might be tough."

This weekend, the society hosts its annual pruning demonstration. Some 300 to 400 novices are expected to attend.

Streeper is the longtime organizer of the event. Those who want to participate should bring their own pruners — and gloves.

— Jeanne Schinto

Rose-Pruning Demonstration by the San Diego Rose Society
Saturday & Sunday,
January 6 & 7
9:00 a.m. to noon
Inez Grant Parker Memorial
Rose Garden, Balboa Park
Free
Info: 619-239-0512

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