

Calendar

Disease-Resistant Rosie O'Donnell

Easy Care Roses for Southern California

What do breeders sacrifice when they produce easy-care roses? This reporter asks, knowing that nothing comes without a cost. Are there fewer blooms? Smaller ones? Less vividly colored ones, perhaps?

"No," says Tom Carruth, director of research for Weeks Roses in Upland, California. "Unfortunately, the most likely thing lost with easy care is fragrance."

Genetically there's a link, and that's what breeders, so far in vain, have tried to overcome, says Carruth. The challenge is to retain fragrance while improving a rose's vigor, disease resistance, and longevity.

"We've been able to make some breaks," he says. "There are actually

many different fragrances of roses now — licorice, spice, raspberry, grapefruit." However, what continues to elude Carruth and others is easy care coupled with the classic damask rose scent.

Carruth, in the rose business for 27 years, has been breeding the plants since the '80s. "My first one was a greenhouse variety called Fire 'n' Ice, and it's still in production." One of his latest is named Barbra Streisand. "This year I'll introduce Marilyn Monroe. George Burns and Gracie Allen are both my roses. And I helped introduce one named for Rosie O'Donnell. As a trend it comes and goes — naming roses for people. When I entered the business it was anathema to name a rose for a person unless they were very highly thought of and dead."

Do breeders name their own roses or do marketers? "At Weeks, several of us work together when it comes time to name," says Carruth. "Certainly as the hybridizer, I have a very strong influence. By that point I've known the variety for eight years" — generally the time it takes to breed a new rose. "I'm not about to see it killed by a bad name," and this can happen. By the same token, a good name can save a mediocre rose. "For instance, the only reason that the John F. Kennedy is still around is because of the name."

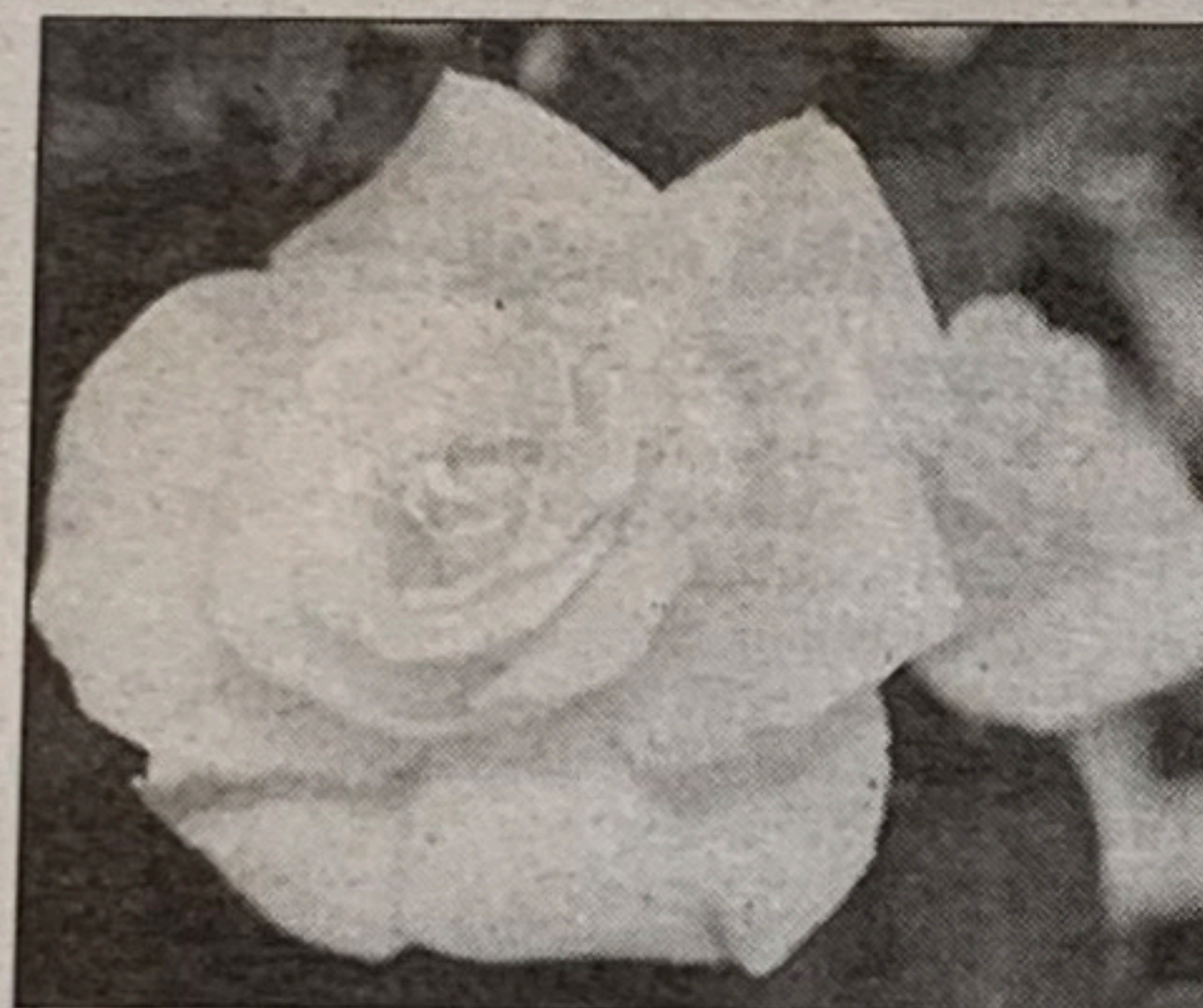
A rose by any name wants a certain set of growing conditions, and it can be created in each of San Diego's varied terrains, says Carruth. "Roses like a well-drained, sandy loam. If your natural soil doesn't provide it, then you must. If you have heavy clay, you will want to add organic material and



George Burns



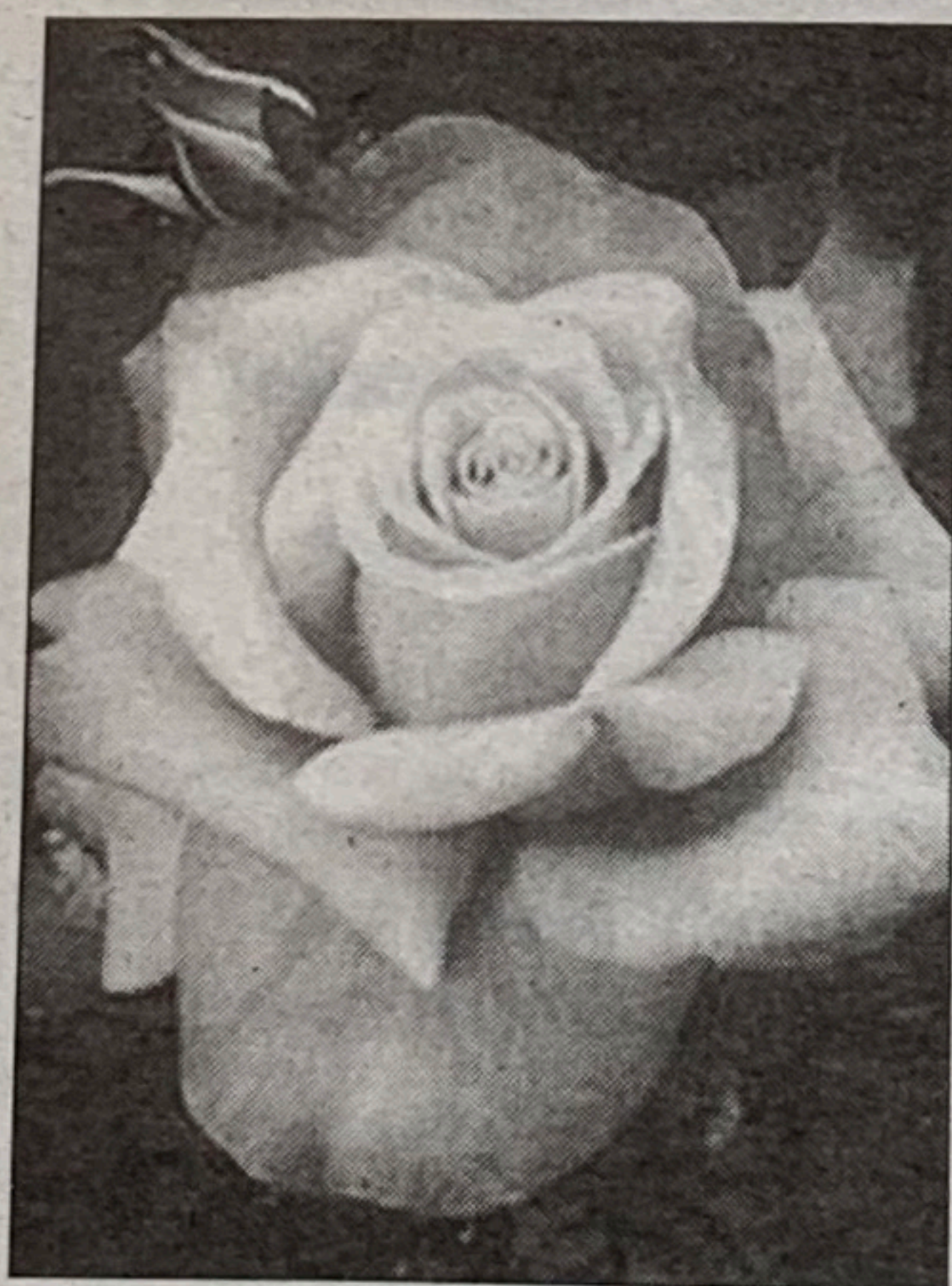
Gracie Allen



John F. Kennedy



Tom Carruth



Barbra Streisand



Rosie O'Donnell

probably lime. If you have rockier, shale soil, you may want to consider a built-up bed rather than trying to amend that soil, which is a difficult task. And with a very sandy soil, you will want to add both organics and clay. A certain percentage of clay is helpful, because it retains the soil's nutrients."

Once the bed is prepared, you

must select the right rose for your locale. For ideas, scout the successes in the public gardens — Balboa Park and Carlsbad's Flower Fields, for instance.

You may also want to take advantage of a free service offered by the American Rose Society. "This national organization of hobbyists has a program called the Consulting Rosarian that will put you in touch

with two or three knowledgeable people who live near you and will answer your specific regional questions." (See www.ars.org.)

Pruning should be customized to one's locale, too, says Carruth; he regrets that this is little understood by Californians. "The closer you are to the coast, the later you should prune. You should never prune any earlier than January 15, in any case. But if you're on the coast, it should be more like early February. The reason is, we don't really stop roses from growing here; after pruning, they immediately start growing again. And powdery mildew, the fungus most prevalent in this area, loves to grow in cool, moist conditions on nice, fresh shoots. If you prune too early, you provide the perfect conditions for it. By pruning later, you're a little off cycle, and it won't grab hold as badly."

With all other conditions met, you still need something else. "You cannot attempt to grow roses in partial shade or full shade," says Carruth, even-voiced except on this subject. "It just won't work. Period. They like their sun. They have to have sun."

Another must is air circulation. "Don't crowd your roses. Moving air will keep down diseases."

Disease does seem to be an inevitable part of a rose's life; and so are sprays. "I will use one maybe three times a year," says Carruth, who will speak about easy-care roses at the next meeting of the San Diego Horticultural Society. "But I'll use it as a preventative — before anything has happened. Don't wait until you see the problem."

Is it possible to grow an organic rose?

"Yes, but if you lean toward perfection, you're probably going to be frustrated going organic," Carruth warns. "Your roses will still be beautiful, but they may have blemishes, just as organic fruit often does. Organic roses aren't perfect, and organic rose gardeners need to be one with that thought."

— Jeanne Schinto

"Some Easy Care Roses for Southern California"
Monday, January 14,
6:30-9:00 p.m.
Del Mar Fairgrounds
(north corner of
main parking lot)
Satellite Wagering Facility
Jimmy Durante Boulevard
Free
760-630-7307

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