

# THE BEGINNING

By Paris Merriam

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to enter your first rose show? If so, you are not alone. There is a first time for everything, and the beginning is where it all starts.

Prior to my ever entering a rose show, I attended the Del Mar Fair in 1996 and saw some beautiful roses on display. There were miniature roses (my favorites), hybrid teas, floribundas and grandifloras everywhere. What a beautiful sight to see, and what a wonderful smell to enhance your senses. If you have never been to a rose show before, attending any ARS show or the Del Mar Fair would be an excellent place to start. It's truly an exhilarating experience to see the beauty of all the roses entered into competition and see the rose chosen "Queen of Show".

When I attended the Del Mar Fair, I immediately walked over to the Flower and Garden Show office to let them know I wanted to enter some of my miniature roses the next day. Although they appreciated my enthusiasm, they told me that I would have to wait until next May to apply, and once my application was in, I could enter my rose that summer. What a disappointment, as I had been growing roses for at least 10 years, and I felt that what I was growing was almost as good as what I was seeing on display. One of the main reasons I wanted to enter the rose show was to share with the public what I was growing and what a great place to start to do this.

In order to prepare for my first rose show, I had to decide what roses I was going to take. It is important to first get a rose show schedule ahead of time to see what categories or divisions there are for the show. It is also very important to read the rules and regulations governing the rose show in this schedule, as it will tell you whether or not you are limited to the number of blooms of one variety that you can enter. Once this is done, don't try to take too many roses to the show as this may produce what I call "stress". Take only the roses that you feel are the best quality and those you are most proud of and will be enjoyed by the public. As time is limited to enter the rose show, by taking fewer roses you will not feel stressed and you will enjoy entering the select roses that you have grown.

In order to get the roses ready for the show, they should be stored in containers appropriate for the size of the rose you are taking. For example, since I show mostly miniature roses, they can easily be stored and transported to the show in large plastic cups. For the larger roses, you can put them in plastic tubes or larger containers that they can easily fit in with out damaging the stems, foliage, or blooms. Never put too many roses in any one given container and always make sure there is adequate water in each of the containers you are using. Finally, as traveling to the show can be bumpy, make sure that the containers you are using are in a box or firmly supported so as to not cause them to tip over and spill, thus damaging your roses. Any grooming of your roses, including cleaning the foliage, can be done ahead of time so that you don't have to do it on the day of the show.

As with any other type of competition, there are some feelings and apprehensions that I experienced. Were my roses good enough? Are the experienced exhibitors going to laugh at my entries and critique my abilities? Did I put something in the wrong category and will it be disqualified? Did I misname a rose? Was I too loud in the preparation area and did I disturb other fellow competitors? The fact is, my anxieties and "fears of the unknown" were realistic feelings and could only be overcome by merely moving through the process. Thank God, with every beginning there usually is an end. Most importantly, if exhibiting roses turns out to be

your passion, as it appears to be mine, trial by error and learning from your mistakes can only make you a better person and a better exhibitor.

My overall feeling and impression of the rose shows, apart from the competition, is that most rosarians are friendly people who enjoy growing roses as much as you do. Thus, the rose shows can serve as an excellent place to network with others and establish relationships with the public or fellow competitors. And although winning a trophy or ribbon can be satisfying, the part of the rose show that I enjoy the most is going to breakfast with my fellow exhibitors (after entering our entries) and talking with the general public who attend the rose show.

The first rose show I entered was during the summer at the 1997 Del Mar Fair. I attended a beginners' workshop and learned the basics of entering, grooming, and rules of the show. Although I didn't win any blue ribbons for first place, I did receive a few second place and third place ribbons. However, this was "The Beginning".

I enjoyed the experience so much that I had to enter my first ARS show in Santa Barbara in the Fall of 1997. I went the night before the show, got a hotel room, and hardly slept at all. In the morning, I stumbled out of bed very early and took my roses over to the location where the rose show was to be held. Based on my prior experience from the Del Mar Fair, I proceeded to enter my roses in their appropriate categories. Although I didn't know what to expect, when I came back to the show after breakfast, there sitting next to the other trophy winners of the show, was my mini rose for the Best Novice Miniature Rose. The name of the rose was *Brian Donn*, a beautiful dark red mini with lots of petals. With the award came two beautiful mini crystal vases and an ARS certificate.

Typically, there is no cost to enter most ARS shows. However, some District and National shows do require registration fees, as these are usually extravagant shows with people coming from all over the country and sometimes the world. The Del Mar Fair also requires registration fees, but they are nominal. However, unlike the ARS shows, the Del Mar Fair awards prize money for first, second and third places.

You do not have to stay for the whole show once you enter, but your entries (roses) do become property of the rose show. Often, they take the roses to hospitals, senior citizen complexes, or charities after the show. Leftover roses from the exhibitors in the morning are often donated to the show so the rose society can sell them to the public during the show. This is an excellent way for the host society to make money. And if you win a trophy and can't be present to accept it, someone can pick it up for you (if you make arrangements with the show chairman or typically with another fellow exhibitor). Ribbons can usually be mailed to you if you indicate to the show chairman that you are interested in receiving them.

There is really no "dress code" for an exhibitor to enter a rose show. As most of us are rose growers, it is not uncommon to see even the best exhibitors wearing jeans and sweatshirts while entering roses in the morning. The most important aspect is to dress comfortably and warm, as it is usually cold in the morning and this is typically when entries are received. The only exception to this are the ARS Judges who are well-dressed, and at some District and National shows the awards banquets are usually formal attire.

So, if you think showing roses would be something you would like to try, give it a shot. You will learn a lot from the experience, and you can share in the joy and satisfaction of participating in something that you already enjoy, growing roses. And most importantly, don't worry about winning in the beginning – just have fun doing it!