

MIGHTY MIDGETS

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Have you tried growing "micro-minis", the smallest of the miniature rose varieties? They are not designated as such in the ARS Handbook For Selecting Roses', however, this term is used in the description in most miniature rose catalogs and sometimes in 'ARS Modern Roses 10'. The term defines the rose as extremely small in bloom, foliage and stature. The unofficial limit seems to be at one inch bloom and foliage size. Many miniature roses are border-line for being designated as micro-minis. **Charlie Brown** is a good example. The 1" to 1 ¼" red and white stripe semi-double blooms and very small medium green foliage on a compact bushy plant is 12 – 15" in height; could be considered by some as a micro-mini, yet is not designated as such. Then there are those that are sold as micro-minis, but in our climate they grow taller and wider than what fits the micro-mini distinction. **Little Megan** is one that was sold in Oregon as a micro-mini, however, even though this rose fits in bloom and foliage size, it will get to a height and width of over 18" if left without grooming. So, don't get too particular or technical with the term "micro-mini.

The micro-minis I call my "Mighty Midgets" are mighty in strength and endurance, and midget in bloom, foliage size and stature. Most are disease-resistant, sturdy, vigorous and healthy. They are a delightful novelty, besides being the ultimate border plants, most staying between 10"-12" in height and width. A very few will get taller, but their height is easily controlled by occasional shaping. Their foliage is usually very dense. The blooms are typically between ¾" to 1" and in masses. Even when the bloom is borne singly, there are so many on one cane, you'd swear they were in clusters. Besides being great for borders I now use them in my "eye level" hanging containers. They don't droop, however, their compact nature makes them safe and perfect to hang close to traffic areas. Many are "self cleaning", another big plus for the busy gardener, and some are very nearly thorn-less. The ARS rating is quite often not very complimentary, but I imagine this is because most do not have exhibition type blooms. They make a striking contrast when placed strategically in the landscape, so if you like the rose, and it performs well for you, then keep it in your collection, regardless of the ARS rating..

My favorites seem to be the various shades of pink, pink blends and the mauve colored roses. **Live Wire** heads my list with deep red-pink blooms that are darker on the reverse and age lighter. It has double blooms of about 25-30 petals, usually borne singly, and very plentiful. This little 'midget' rose is very ambitious, so you'll need to divide it every two or three years. The foliage is very tiny, medium green with just a few prickles. The 7.5 rating is low, but then I'm prejudiced since it's one of my favorites. **My Baby** is another deep pink, with very tiny double blooms in clusters so dense you can hardly cut just one bloom; you have to cut a branch. The foliage is glossy and dark, and has few if any prickles. It makes a nice contrast if planted close to one with lighter foliage. ARS gives this rose only a 6.4 rating, but I sure like it, and it performs well in our climate. **Trinket**, a medium-pink, double bloom is another 'midget' I wouldn't be without and is in contention for my favorites list. I would be remiss if I did not mention **Rouletti**, another medium pink that is classed as a China (OGR) rose. The tiny, rose-lavender pink, semi-double blooms are a joy to behold. Its structure is somewhat loose, so I found it showed best in a "eye level" hanging container. The actual cultivation date

is questionable, however, ARS 'Modern Roses 10' puts in at 1922. It's a repeat bloomer and is the parent of many of the cultivated miniature roses we have today. A newer Micro-mini (1991) that seems to be quite popular is **Giselle**.

This "mighty midget" is most interesting. The outer edges of the flower petals are medium pink, with light pink centers, which ages to ivory stripes. The semi-double blooms are usually borne singly, and it's a wonderful little 'midget' to add contrast to the collection.

Of the light pinks, **Baby Ophelia**, **Sweet-Sue** and **Pink Cherub** are all very nice, but at this time, I choose **Baby Betsey McCall** as my favorite. It has the daintiest, most delicate 1" light apple blossom pink blooms you'd every want to see. The blooms are not as full as you might like, with only about 20 petals, so if you prefer the really full-petaled bloom, then choose **Sweet Fairy**, which has about twice as many petals. It's been around since 1946 and is still a favorite. The ARS rating of 7.8, for **Baby Betsey McCall**, and 7.6 for **Sweet Fairy**, reflects their popularity, even though they've been with us for some time.

I seem to have acquired more white and light pink than any other color. The white micro-mini, **Si**, is the smallest rose I have ever seen. It's soft, pinkish-white, tender blooms are less than ½", and cover the plant with dense clusters. The foliage is so tiny, and without thorns! This 'midget' is sure to catch your attention when placed at eye level where it won't be missed. It seems to prefer morning sun or light shade in the afternoon. The 7.6 ARS rating indicates it's still very popular, even though it's over 40 years old. My favorite white is **Angelita** with its multitude of ¾" very delicate blooms on short stems in mass on a compact mound of about 10-12" high and as wide. I sue it in a "eye level" hanging container along the walkway. Its bloom is not quite as small as SI, but the plant seems hardier. It's 8.4 ARS rating is well-deserved. It also appears to be able to take a little afternoon shade. A white with a hint of pink I really like using in the border is **Cinderella**. This 'Mighty Midget' can get to about 15" tall and almost as wide if you let it. It forms clusters of perfect ¾" full-double blooms on very densely foliaged canes. It's always in bloom, and the canes are usually long enough to be used as filler in cut arrangements. You can't really question whether it is a micro-mini, because the blooms and foliage are so tiny, even though the stature of the plant is taller than most micro-minis. This rose has been with us since 1953 and still gets an ARS 8.3 rating.

In the mauve color group, I like **Baby Cheryl**, a light lavender in our warm climate, and **Purple Elf**, a fuchsia-purple very full double bloom, but my favorite is **Elfinglo**. The tiny ½" double, magenta-red purple, fragrant blooms come in clusters that can be seen clear across the yard. The ARS rating of 7.6 doesn't do it justice. You'll want several of these in your border!

Another rose you'll want several of is **Red Minimo**, which gets around 12" tall and wide. It's very hardy and disease-resistant and the dark scarlet-red blooms come in small clusters. It blooms profusely and is very attractive as a border plant. The 8.3 ARS rating in 1998 slipped to a 7.8 in 2000, but it's still and 8.3 in my book. Tom Thumb, a delightful red blend semi-double bloom serves its purpose well as a border rose. It is quite showy both up close and from a distance, and its low 6.9 ARS rating is a good example of my personal approval out weighting the ARS rating. It's beautiful in my landscape, and certainly not inferior in my eyes.

There are several nice yellow micro-minis but I have found only one that receives higher than a 7.0 by ARS. **Lynne Gold** is one of my favorites, a medium-yellow that holds its color well. It's bushy, spreading growth makes it a nice choice for an "eye level" container. **Cinderella Gold** is another nice medium yellow and the small, light green foliage is an interesting contrast to the darker green of many of the micro-minis. It's fairly new (1995), and has not been rated yet. **Yellow Bantam** is a light yellow fading to creamy white, and the only light yellow micro-mini I have found. If you really like the tiny blooms and foliage as I do, and don't mind a little extra height, then I recommend **Little Megan**. It has the most beautiful tiny hybrid tea-like buds, opening to full double 1" blooms of striking dark yellow with a hint of pink on the tips of the outer petals as they age. They are borne mostly single, and one stem can have 10 to 20 blooms. This rose is always in bloom, is self cleaning and the 8.2 ARS rating shows it's a favorite. But is it a micro-mini? I'm not going to split hairs over a few inches of height. It's still one of my favorite 'mighty midgets'!

Last but not least of my favorite 'mighty midgets' is **Spice Drop**. This light (op) salmon, very double, hybrid tea-like bloom is a lovely color blend on a compact, well-branched symmetrical plant that stays about 12" in height. The foliage is not as dense as some micro-minis, but the bloom color is especially nice, and adds variety to my collection.

These easy to care for disease-resistant 'mighty midgets' that perform well in our climate, deserve to be placed where they will be noticed, up front as a border rose or in a "eye level" hanging container along a walkway. With so much emphasis today on huge blooms, it's nice to have these 'mighty midgets' around for variety, contrast and interest.