

TRIALS GUIDE

The Royal National Rose Society has run garden trials of new roses since 1928 and the first awards were made in 1930. Previously medals had been awarded only to cut blooms at shows. The Trial Grounds were originally near Haywards Heath. Since the early 1960's the Trials have been at St Albans. They are housed in a fenced enclosure outside the main gardens, where they can be visited as part of a guided tour.

The first awards were made in 1930 when 41 varieties received 1st Class Certificates. Among the early winners was 'The New Dawn' in 1932. Over the years many famous cultivars have passed through the Trials. 'Queen Elizabeth' won the President's International Trophy in 1955 and 'Iceberg' got a Gold Medal in 1958.

In the early days the trial ground Committee would meet as a body in June, July, August and September to visit the roses. The weather, then as now, was a problem. The summer of 1933 was dry and hot, after a cold, late spring. The roses in the trials flowered early, but there was little rain in July and August. The committee did not meet, and deferred making any awards until the following season. At that time the Trials Grounds also housed a collection of species roses, which members were urged to visit.

It was not until 1963 that the practice of judges making individual visits began. The size of the committee was increased so that instead of inspecting the roses on specified occasions, there could be a system of weekly visits throughout the season. This decision reflected bad weather the previous summer as an article in the *Rose Annual* for 1963 explained. The author was Harry Edland, Secretary of the Society, whose name is perpetuated with the award given annually to the most scented rose among the trial-winners.

This is the system still current today, though instead of having set weeks to visit, judges undertake a minimum of three judging sessions at different periods during the season. And the reason for the change? It is still the weather. There is little point in coming to judge roses if not enough are in flower that week or it is pouring with rain....

New roses are sent to the Trial Grounds by professional and amateur breeders and undergo a three-year trial. During the first year, they are allowed to settle in, while judges keep an eye open for problems like disease. During the second and third years, the roses are carefully assessed by a panel of 16 – 20 judges. The judges work independently, though they meet at the beginning and end of each season to discuss general issues.

Each rose is given points out of 100: up to 30 for health, vigour and habit; up to 30 for the beauty of the flower and how it looks at every stage; up to 30 for the overall effect; up to 10 for scent.

Health, vigour and habit are assessed by the absence of fungal and viral diseases, and an ability to produce robust new shoots and well-proportioned growth. The beauty of

the flower is assessed at all stages: in bud, as it opens and when fully open. Flowers should also age well or shatter cleanly when they are fading. One of the ways to judge the overall effect is to consider whether the flowers are nicely spaced and complement the foliage. A handsome bush with plenty of flowers will also gain points. The overall effect is where the 'novelty' factor is considered. Something unusual will gain points. Judges were attracted as though by a magnet when 'Rhapsody in Blue' began to flower in the Trials.

Scent is the final section, with 0 for something unpleasant and 10 for a truly powerful scent that pleases to the nose and carries on the air. The 10 points for scent often make the difference between a winner and an also-ran.

Judges take their marks over the whole period into consideration when submitting the final numbers. The highest and lowest marks given to a variety are then eliminated and the remainder averaged to give the result. Roses getting 75 points receive a Gold Medal, 72.5 a Certificate of Merit, 70 a Trial Ground Certificate. The award-winning rose with the best scent receives the Henry Edland Memorial Medal; the Torridge Award goes to the best rose bred by an amateur. There are special prizes for particular groups of roses. But there are always exceptions – and the weather is usually to blame.....

The results are published each year in the late autumn.

The judging panel is a mixture of experienced amateurs and professional breeders and growers. A small committee drawn from their number manages the trials.

Roses are grown in the open under approximate garden conditions. They are watered, fed and given some fungal and insecticide treatment while they become established. The roses are numbered, not named.

In addition to the trials of new varieties, a new trial of 'products and practices' started in 2007. This is intended to test the proposition that feeding is more important than spraying with chemicals. In a separate area of the Trial Grounds are eight beds each containing the same four rose cultivars: 'Buxom Beauty', 'Hot Chocolate', 'Nostalgia' and 'Tickled Pink'. Three products and cultivation practices are on trial with an untreated section as control. The judges do not know which is which. Here they make simple judgements on a scale of 1 – 4 on vigour, insect attack, abundance of flower and health. The results of this trial will be published in 2009.

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