

Coming up roses

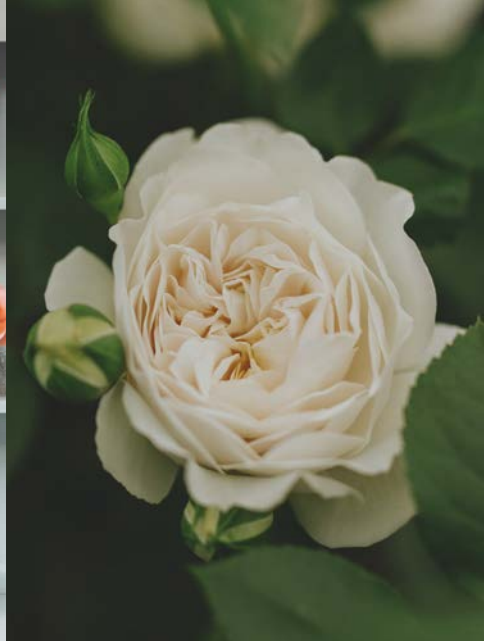
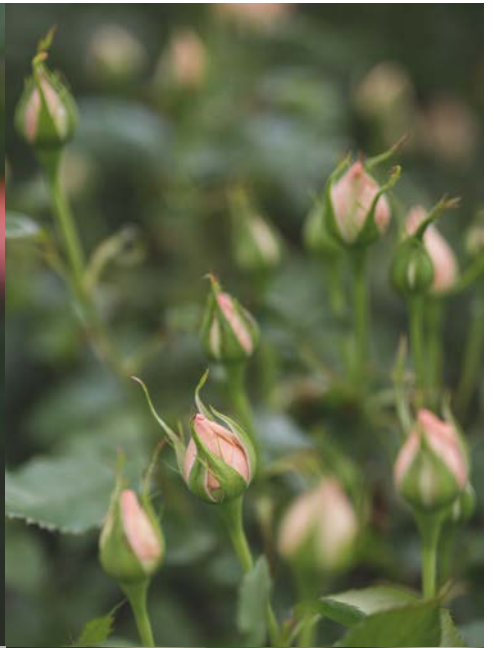
CLARE FOSTER continues her series on the cutting garden, focusing this month on growing a variety of roses for scent and colour, with advice from Green and Gorgeous flower farmer Rachel Siegfried

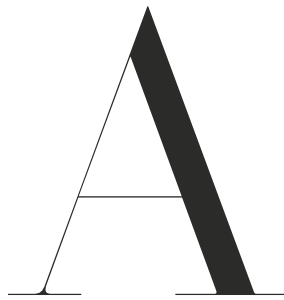
PHOTOGRAPHS EVA NEMETH

THIS PAGE 'Just Joey' is a hybrid tea rose with large, sumptuous blooms. **OPPOSITE** Rachel grows about 30 rose varieties, chosen for scent, colour and repeat flowering









long with Pimm's and strawberries and cream, roses are one of the most potent symbols of British summertime. With their heavily scented, sumptuous blooms, they exude an old-fashioned charm

that appeals to almost everyone and make the most romantic arrangements, whether displayed singly, clustered together in posies, or thrown together with other summer flowers in a looser composition. For Rachel Siegfried, who grows cut flowers on her farm in Oxfordshire, roses are an essential in the cutting patch. 'Roses are probably my favourite of all flowers,' she says. 'I grow repeat-flowering, scented roses. Scent is so important because that is what is missing when you buy roses in the shops. They've had the scent bred out of them so that they can be transported from the main rose-growing countries – Kenya, Ecuador, Colombia. Scent shortens vase life, so that's why it has been bred out.'

Rachel grows a mixture of hybrid teas, floribunda and shrub roses, choosing those that perform best over a long season. Because she is picking so intensively from her plants, they will eventually become unproductive, so she replants afresh every five or six years to rejuvenate her stock. In most circumstances, however, plants would last at least 10 years. She recommends planting bare-root roses during the dormant season between November and March, which is cheaper than buying container-grown plants.

Once the plants are established, they will need to be pruned in late winter (although not just before or during a very cold snap). 'We prune very hard – literally to about 30–40cm off the ground, leaving perhaps four main stems,' says Rachel. 'All the normal pruning rules apply: cut out all dead wood and crossing branches, and cut the branches just above a main bud at an angle, so that the water can run off.' Cutting the roses back brutally means that the regrowth produces long, straight picking stems, and it also takes out any potentially diseased material to rejuvenate the plant.

After pruning, Rachel mulches the roses with a good shovelful of well-rotted compost or manure and then waits for them to break bud. Once this happens, the feeding regime

ROSE VARIETIES

BEST FOR SCENT 'Chandos Beauty' (hybrid tea) has the most incredibly strong scent, and huge, blowsy pink-apricot flowers.

BEST FOR LONG-FLOWERING 'Irish Hope' (floribunda) has pale yellow flowers with a delicate honey-lemon perfume.

BEST VASE LIFE 'Duchess of Cornwall' has flowers that open deep coral and gradually turn a softer peachy pink.

BEST FOR STRONG COLOUR 'Princess Alexandra of Kent' (shrub rose) has sumptuous flowers in a glowing pink.

BEST FOR LARGE BLOOMS 'Just Joey' (hybrid tea) has coppery-orange flowers up to 14cm in diameter. They are loose and relaxed, so ideal for bouquets.

can begin. 'If you want roses to repeat flower throughout the season with good blooms still coming in September and October, you have to feed every week,' Rachel advises. 'We use a foliar feed initially, Uncle Tom's Rose Tonic, which is what all the rose growers use – it's miracle stuff. You spray it on the leaves and it makes them more resistant to black spot and other disease. As the season progresses and the plant forms flower buds, you start giving them a high potash feed, like comfrey tea, which will keep the roses healthy and flowering in flushes through the season.'

June is prime rose month, with blooms coming thick and fast. At this stage, you just have to keep picking, and deadhead like mad every week during the growing season to encourage more flowers. 'You can pick roses when they're quite tight in bud,' says Rachel. 'As long as the sepals are reflexed back, they will open. I like

to pick flowers in different stages of growth for a single arrangement – some quite blown, and some in bud. I'm never governed by vase life – I'm trying to make a painterly composition and that's why I need them in different stages. The arrangement will then look as if it was transferred straight from the garden into the vase.'

Often, Rachel will simply arrange roses and nothing else, but she also loves combining them with other things to give that fresh, fulsome early summer feeling. Here, they mix with *Ammi majus*, *Nigella papillosa* 'African Bride' and *Eryngium giganteum* 'Silver Ghost', as well as Rachel's flower of the season *Phlox drummondii* 'Crème Brûlée', which she describes as 'a brilliant filler'. She has also used *Rosa glauca* foliage and some very early *Viburnum opulus* berries to balance the flowers.

The roses produce a second flush of blooms in late summer. After this, they are lightly pruned again, with a third of the growth lopped off to prevent wind-rock damage through the winter. At this point, the feeding ceases. 'Roses are a huge amount of work,' admits Rachel. 'But most people will need to have only two or three plants to cut from and they are so worth it. I cannot imagine my life without them' □

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Green and Gorgeous runs courses on growing cut flowers and floristry, and its farm is open for sales on Saturdays, 9am–4pm, until October. Visit greenandgorgeousflowers.co.uk for more details. Rachel buys her roses from Pockocks Roses in Hampshire: garden-roses.co.uk



FLOWER GARDEN DIARY

June tasks

Sow biennials, so that they will flower in May of the following year.

Plant out dahlias that you have been growing on in pots.

Plant out half-hardy annuals.

Stake or support any tall plants.

Deadhead spent flowers that have not been picked to encourage repeat flowering.

Continue to feed roses with a high potash feed.

OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Rachel picking 'Irish Hope'. Delicate pink 'L'Aimant'. 'Chandos Beauty' in bud. Creamy white 'Susan'. 'Sweet Dream', a patio rose. Coral pink 'Duchess of Cornwall'. 'Queen London Child', another patio rose. 'Chandos Beauty'. A display of roses in Rachel's vintage vases (centre). THIS PAGE Rachel's finished rose arrangement