

Hardy Roses in Iceland

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The Nordic Rose Weekend was hosted by Iceland on a sunny July weekend in 2012. (Photo VL)

Problems of climate and hardiness

Icelanders are relative newcomers to growing of roses. While individual amateur gardeners have been growing roses for decades with varying success it was not until the Rose Club of The Icelandic Horticultural Society was established in 2002 that organized trials were started and the dissemination of knowledge about rose gardening appropriate for our geographical situation really started.

In 2008 edition of the Canadian Rosarian an article by this author entitled *Growing Roses in Iceland* was published which gave a short account of the conditions for and history of rose growing in Iceland. In the following paragraphs I shall elaborate more on some of the roses that experience shows are suitable for growing under the rather special conditions found in Iceland.

Frost hardiness is not the most important test to rose hardiness in Iceland. Winter temperatures never fall very low - nowadays rarely below minus 10-12 °C in the south and

west. The cool summers and the lack of sunny days during the growing season are more frequently a limiting factor which affects both the flowering and the maturing of stems before winter sets in. The alternating periods of wet thaw and dry frost during the winter months are an excruciating test for most cultivated varieties of roses. Those that survive the ordeal over long periods are those we can call "hardy" in our case. Thus we have to take the North-American as well as the Nordic hardiness scales with a grain of salt. Only experience by growing on location can proof which varieties are suitable

After nearly a decade of increasingly sunny and warm summers Icelanders felt they were enjoying the fortunate side of Global Warming. The summers of 2009 to 2012 were all among the sunniest and warmest on record. Then came the summer of 2013 and we woke up to reality of our global position. It was one of the wettest on record in south-western Iceland. The pattern was familiar to those of us borne before the middle of the 20th century. The sun did not show for weeks on end and the monthly average temperatures for June, July and August remained more than a degree Celsius below average for the last thirty years reminding us of the misery of 1983, 1975, 1955 and 1949, depending on our living memory!

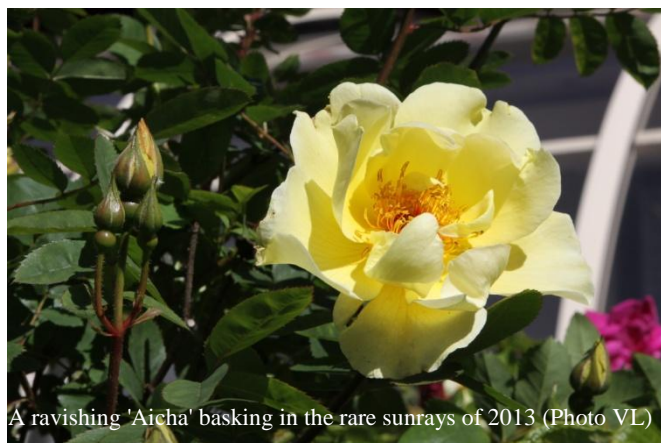


The Swedis beauty 'Huldra' did not let rain and cloudy sky deter its blooming. (Photo KG)

This put roses and flowering shrubs to a severe test and our gardening patience as well. While the green growth was quite strong this year the flowering and the setting of fruit was absent for many varieties or delayed by anywhere from three weeks in some to two months in others. The upside was, however, that a few individual rose varieties have shown a remarkably good performance and one could also observe see how different classes of roses performed under stress. Thus

of the alba roses never managed to open their buds, except 'Celestial' which started to flower in September. Somewhat surprisingly the spinosissmas (or pimpinellifolias) seem to tolerate rain and cold less well than most rugosa varieties and even some more complex hybrids.

The exception was the Swedish bred 'Huldra' ('Poppius' \times *Rosa rubiginosa* L.) which



A ravishing 'Aicha' basking in the rare sunrays of 2013 (Photo VL)

remained in flower from early July until end of September, showing its relationship to its 18th century, hardy mother 'Poppius' of pimpinellia origin. Another good and more unexpected performer was the Danish born 'Aicha' from the fingers of Valdemar Petersen. A few days of sunshine in late July produced a rich flush of flowers on 'Aicha' that kept long into the cloudy period that followed. Another exception was the Canadian 'Kakwa' bred by John Alexander

Wallace. Even the usually very reliable 'Hurdal' (R.villos/R. alba cross ?) which we got from

Norway in the eighties was both greatly delayed and reduced in flowering. The same happened to *R. francofurtana* 'Frankfurt' which is still trying to open flowers as this is written in the first week of October.



Interestingly some Canadian rose varieties with *rugosa* blood performed particularly well. This might indicate where Icelandic rose breeding should be heading. Icelandic rose breeding has recently started but it is too early to report on in this article.

Other roses that did well this year were the Latvian beauty 'Ritausma' (also known in Canada as 'Polareis') and the redhot

'Hansaland' from Kordes Rosen.

Finnish Roses do well

Finns have since the early eighties done a lot of work in identifying and classifying roses that have survived a harsh and variable climate which in some ways resembles that of Iceland, especially in the early spring and summer. In 2007 members of our Rose Club visited Finland and brought back information which led to the import of a number of varieties that have since proved quite successful in Iceland.



Roses have been cultivated in Finland over several centuries, originally by the Swedish and later Russian upper classes under their respective periods of rule. In later years Finns themselves have rediscovered old and hardy varieties as well as spontaneous newcomers that the bees and the birds have generated, often in most unusual locations such as parking lots and railway stations. One such rose is 'Ruskela' named after the town it was found. This spinosissima variety does normally very well in Iceland as does 'Ristinummi' another probable *spinosissima* x *rugosa* cross

named after the railway station where it was found. One interesting example of a "found rose" got the name "Thätitorninkatu" or "Observatory Street" after the street where it was found. It has recently turned out it was growing widely in Finland and in Sweden in old an abandoned gardens and by DNA analysis identified as the ancient rose 'Blush Damask'. It turns out that it does quite well in Iceland.



Finns have also produced roses by crossing known varieties which do well in Iceland. One such is 'Sointu' (Snow Pavement x [Rosa x polyantha]), a very floriferous rugosa derivative released by the English born Peter Joy and his co-workers who started a rose breeding program originally under a program at the University of Helsinki. They now have released another five varieties that also look promising. Among them is 'Tove Jansson' ('Red Nelly' x 'Poppius') another beautiful deep purple rose.

Canadian rose enthusiasts living in difficult places would do well by looking for roses from Finland in the future.

Canadian roses in Iceland



'George Will' is a popular and widely known in Iceland (Photo VL)

Canadian roses have slowly found their way to Iceland and some of them proved their excellence. The roses bred by F.L. Skinner such as 'George Will', 'Wasagaming' and 'Ms Joe MacNab' have performed particularly well while 'Suzanne' and 'Betty Bland' are somewhat less reliable. 'Haidee' and 'Will Alderman' just found their way to Iceland via Denmark and it is too early to say how they perform.

Some of George Bugnet's roses are doing extremely well, in particular 'Lac Majeau', 'Marie Bugnet' and 'Louise Bugnet'. The last named was chosen rose of the year in 2011 in Iceland by members of the Rose Club and 'Lac Majeau' stood for candidacy this year because of her amazing performance through rain and storm during the miserable summer of 2013. Her only problem in the popularity campaign is that she is not widely available in garden centers as yet! 'Therese Bugnet' is on the other hand well known but somewhat less reliable a performer here in Iceland than her other sisters.



'Lac Majeau' gave an astonishing performance in 2013 (Photo KG)

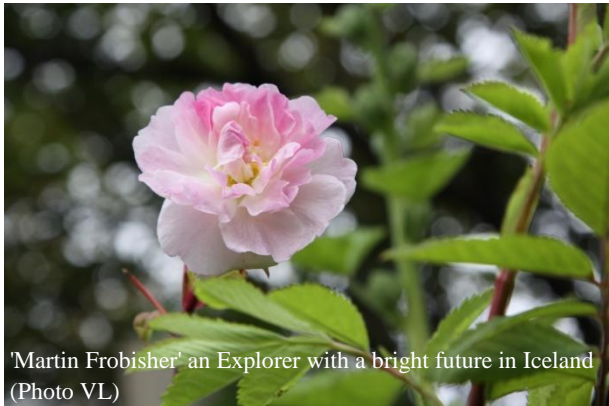


'Jens Munk' smiling on Sept. 28, 2013 (Photo KG)

She loses parts of her summer growth in the winter and produces much fewer flowers. We would love to get our hands on 'Rita Bugnet' and 'Lac La Nonne' and other Bugnet roses which have not arrived in Iceland as yet.

Many roses from the Explorer Series bred under the direction of Dr. Felicitas Svejda have done very well in Iceland. 'Jens Munk' is a particularly great performer and also competed for the "Rose of the Year" title with 'Lac Majeau' this year. Both of these roses produce flowers summer long until frost cuts them off. Yet they show remarkably little frost

damage the following spring. 'Martin Frobisher' is another remarkable Explorer rose and



'Martin Frobisher' an Explorer with a bright future in Iceland
(Photo VL)

easily grows to 3 m height and is really a candidate for a climber in Iceland but needs help with tying because it lacks the prickles and thorns to hang on. No frost damage and summer long flowering and rain tolerance promises to give this rose a bright future in Iceland. 'Henry Hudson' does normally very well and but was very slow to open his flowers this summer. 'David Thompson' is not widely known here but produces beautiful flowers and is likely to receive more attention in the years to come. The

same thing holds true for 'Charles Albanel'. On the other hand 'Alexander Mackenzie', 'Champlain', 'J.P. Connell' and 'John Franklin' are all late bloomers in Iceland and need very sheltered warm locations close to walls to produce good a flowering. 'Lambert Closse' is a relative newcomer but shows some promise.



'Prairie Dawn' has reached nearly 5 meters here
(Photo VL)

Of other Explorer roses both 'Henry Kelsey' and 'John Cabot' are fairly well known but also need higher summer temperatures to flower and mature well. 'John Davis' generally shows a rather weak growth and is normally short lived in Iceland.

'Prairie Dawn' bred by William Godfrey is yet another Canadian that has proven very hardy, wind tolerant and floriferous in Iceland. There are examples of plants growing up to 5 meters in height, flowering from June to frost.

The Parkland Roses bred by the Morden Farm Experimental station are having a harder time in Iceland than the Explorer roses. They generally seem to want warmer summer days and sunshine than we can offer. 'Morden Fireglow' is perhaps the longest survivor and most promising of the family. It freezes down in the winter but emerges in the early summer to produce some fine flowers in the late summer sun. This year for the lack of sun it could not open its buds in my own country garden.

Icelandic-Canadian rose relations?

There is a good reason for strengthening Icelandic-Canadian rose relations. One of course is



'Prairie Dawn' is a splendid and hardy rose
(Photo VL)

the mounting positive experience with many Canadian roses under the difficult climatic conditions in Iceland. The other is the increasingly lively mutual awareness of the strong ethnic and cultural links between the descendants of 18th century Icelandic emigrants to Canada and Icelanders today. Interestingly some of the very successful Canadian rose breeding activities of Skinner and Bugnet was accomplished not so far from the Icelandic settlements in Alberta and Manitoba. There is also a large Icelandic community in British Columbia. Finally the fact that Icelandair will be flying direct to Halifax, Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver in the coming year opens up a whole spectrum of new opportunities!

Canadian rose enthusiasts on their way to Iceland are welcome to make contacts and our Rose Club would certainly like to establish closer connections with like-minded Canadians.

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For more information see websites:

www.gardurinn.is

www.rosaklubbur.is

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