

Nursery Ramblins

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'Darlow's Enigma' x unknown, 'Irene's Awakening,' 'Yellow Brick Road' x 'John Dickman,' 'Sunny Knockout' x unknown, three 'Abigail Adams Rose' x unknown seedlings, along with other named roses, awaiting spring.

Good Morning Connecticut Rose Society! And, welcome to another edition of Nursery Ramblins. It's that time of year again. That time of year in the dead of winter after the holidays are done, and before Mother Nature brings forth warm weather triggering spring and the start of a new growing season. As we wait for warmer weather, we long to see the roses in our garden blooming again and in their full glory. But, in the world of hybridizing roses, this is a very different and special time of year. This is the time of year when seed germination starts and new roses are born. Brand new, never-been-seen baby roses

enter the world for us to enjoy! Yes! Baby Roses! *Our* baby roses! This is the season of discovery and bringing forth something new. And, it happens right here in our very own little part of paradise! What will our baby roses look like? Will they be pink? Or, white? Maybe even red? Yellow? Or, better yet, maybe something bi-colored? Fragrance? Oh, yes! We would like that! Thank you very much! And, healthy too, please! It is a time of great joy, discovery, happiness, and an early start to the growing season destined to explode in a few months.

A New Rose is Born!

By now, you should have planted your seeds in your seedling trays, put the trays in your growing area, and germinations (if they haven't already started) should be happening really soon. Be sure to replant your seedlings in your small containers as soon as they germinate, preferably before the seedling's first true leaves appear. After they appear, it can be much more difficult to keep the taproot of the seedling intact, and the chance of transplant shock is much greater. Now, for the hard, but very satisfying, work of hybridizing new roses begins – growing your seedlings to maturity. This is the observation/growing phase of hybridizing roses. It is important to remember to keep using good horticultural practices at all times. Keep your growing area clean and tidy. Water your seed trays and seedlings as needed. Young seedlings can be fertilized at 10% normal strength as soon as their first true leaves appear. Always be on the lookout for fungi, aphids, spider mites, and other pests that might be destructive to your seedlings. If





Clockwise left to right August 12, 2012 - 'First Impression' x 'Everblooming Pillar 124,' 'First Impression' x 'Everblooming Pillar 124,' 'First Impression' x 'Abigail Adams Rose,' 'First Impression' x 'Abigail Adams Rose,' 'Everblooming Pillar 124' x unknown, 'First Impression' x 'Everblooming Pillar 124'

you see any, take swift, immediate, and appropriate action to stop their advances. It doesn't take that much for a small and insignificant pest to become a major problem and devastate an entire season's worth of work. Keep a complete and accurate accounting of both positive and negative attributes about your hybrids. Be sure to observe them objectively, and don't be afraid to solicit a second opinion (especially like something as subjective as scent). Take plenty of pictures to help fill in the gaps in your notes and to share with others.

A Little Splash of Color, Please!

As your seedlings grow and mature, you soon notice how different they are. Even seedlings from the same cross can often be remarkably different. When they are only a few weeks old, you may start to notice that some will start to excel far and above the others. It is important to note which ones are the better performers. Be on the lookout for tiny buds forming on your seedlings. When they form on a very young seedling, the seedling is a fully-remontant, modern, hybrid rose. Excellent! This is a good thing. While the temptation to see your new baby's bloom is extremely high, it is important to redirect the energy of flower production back to the plant. This will help to improve the overall health of the seedling. There will be plenty of time to allow new buds to form and open later. To redirect this energy away from flower production, simply cut off the bud. Do not take any leaves with it. The leaves need to be left on the plant to supply energy back to growth. The sooner you do this, the better.

After your seedling has grown enough, it will form buds again. Since the seedling is much larger and stronger than before, it is all right to let the bud open. So, what did you think? Was it the color you thought it would be? Was there any fragrance? Did it have enough



'Darlow's Enigma' x unknown – germinated spring 2012; top left – first bloom May 13, 2012, top right – second bloom May 19, 2012, right – spray of blooms May 22, 2012

petals? Was this what you expected? If it wasn't, don't worry. You should be aware that as seedlings grow and mature, they have a tendency to produce much larger flowers, with more petals. But, the color will almost always be the same. Be sure to write in your notebook notes about the color of the bloom, date, number of petals, and any other impressions you have about the flower for future reference. Be sure to deadhead the spent bloom to redirect the seedling's energy back to growth.



Freshly replanted seedlings – May 13, 2012

Outside is where Your Seedlings Need to be . . .

Seedlings ultimately need to be in the great outdoors with all of the other roses. They need the natural sunlight with enough room around them to allow them to grow, and be tested in real-world gardening conditions. After the chance of frost is completely passed (about May 1st in Southern New England) you need to get your seedlings outside. They need to be large enough to make it on their own to survive. But, before they go out into the

sunshine full time, they need to be “hardened off.” The ultraviolet rays in sunlight will burn the leaves and may kill your roses. To “harden off” your roses, place them outside in an area that gets very little to no direct sunlight. Gradually, increase the amount of sunlight during the next few days, until you are able to put them with your other roses.

Did Anyone Say Testing?

Now that your seedlings are outside in the garden with your other roses, they need to be tested. Everything about your new baby rose is unknown, and it is up to *you* to determine if it is a good rose or not. New hybrid roses are like a blank slate that needs to be filled in. Qualities such as vigor, growth habits, disease-resistance (or lack thereof), flower form, frequency of bloom, hardiness, etc. all need to be evaluated. I often use the outside of my containers like a little notebook. I write many things on them. I write the cross of the seedling, year of germination, date(s) that they bloomed, bloom color, frequency of blooms, disease-resistance, etc. When I see something I like about a seedling, I write it down. When I see something I don't like about a seedling,



'Chihuly' x 'Yellow Brick Road' – August 19, 2012



I write that down as well. This way there is no way to confuse which rose is which, and no rose is ever unintentionally sacrificed. I keep only my best roses. Poor performers are thrown into the compost heap. My roses need to “Earn” their way into my garden. There’s no room for poor performers!

Growing Up

Seedlings eventually grow from less than an inch tall up to 8'-12' high and wide (and sometimes even larger). As a seedling grows it needs to be transplanted into larger, more appropriate containers. This is another area in hybridizing new roses where a little ingenuity and repurposing can save a lot of money. I mix my own potting mix whenever I can. I use a five-gallon bucket and mix one part garden loam, one part sand, and one part peat moss (or aged compost). I stir well, and add water to the mix until the peat moss is thoroughly and completely soaked (sometimes this can take a little time). I add water until the mixture is the consistency of cookie dough. Since containers have a tendency to dry out easily, I add water-absorbing polymer crystals in the mix. I use the crystals to help insure that my roses will get enough moisture during the long, hot, dry summer months. Please remember to follow the instructions included with the crystals carefully. A very small amount can go a really long way, and too many crystals added to the mix can get quite messy.

There is no “rule” as to how large a container should be to use for your seedlings, but I generally transplant my seedlings from the fruit cup containers when they are about 4" high (or when the rose is “root-bound” or drying out too quickly in the small fruit cups). I transplant my seedlings into larger containers about 5" high and wide. But, before I fill up the new container with potting mix, I transcribe any information about the seedling I may have written on my smaller container onto the larger one. I fill up the new container to about ½" from the top, and add a teaspoon of bone meal. I stir in the bone meal, and put my seedling into the new container. Sometimes the roots on a new seedling can be quite long. When this happens, I bury the roots deep in the container, and backfill. My seedlings usually stay in these containers all season long. However, some of the more vigorous seedlings need to be transplanted into progressively larger containers throughout the season. I use as many new containers as necessary. Each time I use a larger one, I transplant it using the same procedure outlined above. The largest I have ever been able to grow a seedling in one season is about 5' high and wide. I let my hybrids grow to their own free will, and transplant them whenever they need it. I water and fertilize them regularly, and increase the amount of fertilizer I give them

'Panda Meidiland'
x unknown
June 9, 2012



as their size increases. I deadhead regularly, and one of my main objectives is growing the seedlings to a large enough size to insure that they will survive the harsh winter months here in Southern New England. I often don't allow seedlings to rebloom after the first time. I feel that it is more important to let the seedling grow, instead of seeing it bloom again and again.

That Age-Old Question . . . to Spray? Or, Not to Spray?

Once your seedlings are outside, they will be exposed to all of the elements usually found in an average rose garden. *You* must decide if you want to spray your seedlings for pests and diseases. If worrying about pest resistance and growing sustainable roses aren't that high on your priority list, then by all means spray your seedlings, and enjoy them. However, this is not a true test for a seedling's resistance against pests and diseases. I do not spray my seedlings at all. I let them get exposed to some of the worst conditions imaginable, in order to test them as best as I possibly can. I feel that after a few years in my garden, I have tested my seedlings to the best of my abilities, and that they are ready for the next step towards introduction. If this is your ultimate goal, I would highly recommend that you do this as well.

Questions and Answers

By mistake, I put my seeds in the freezer instead of the refrigerator. Will the seeds still be o.k.?

Well, maybe. Hybrid rose seeds are quite diverse genetically. Chances are pretty good that the embryos inside were damaged when the seeds froze, but one never does truly know for sure. Mother Nature has many surprises up her sleeve, and there are numerous examples in nature where rose seeds are frozen. I would plant your seeds and see what happens. You might get lucky. Mother Nature is always full of surprises. You may discover that the embryos did not die, and the seeds will germinate just fine.

When should I transplant my seedlings?

I transplant my seedlings as soon as they germinate. Usually within a day or two after germination. In my experience, the longer I wait to transplant the seedling, the harder it is to keep the root system intact.

Final Note

Well folks. That's all I've got to say about growing/raising seedlings to maturity. From this point on, it's up to *you* to insure that your baby roses get what they need. In time, your seedlings will be big enough to plant in the ground alongside your other roses, and you will be able to take care of them



'Metis' x unknown – discarded May 26, 2012

like every other rose in your garden. Eventually, they will blend in with the other roses, and you won't even realize how small they started out.

If your new seedling does not bloom at all its first season, there is no need to worry at this time. Your seedling could be a once-blooming seedling, or a seedling that might need to build up its size before it blooms. Many hybridizers wait up to five years (and sometimes longer depending on the importance of the cross and how much room they have to spare) for the first bloom to appear. Still other hybridizers discard any rose that doesn't bloom its first year. *You and you alone* need to determine how long you are willing to wait for your rose to bloom.

Every hybrid rose you bring into this world is something special. Something you made. It is alive because you wanted it to be alive, and no one else. It is your own unique creation that is nearly impossible to duplicate. But, please remember that if your new rose is inferior and not worthy of the effort of growing it, then it needs to be discarded, and another one created in its place. Way too much time and energy can be wasted growing weak and unhealthy seedlings. There is always another seedling waiting to be born, and it is not uncommon at all for rose hybridizers to cull 85-95% of their seedlings in the first year alone! Good Luck! We're all looking forward to seeing what you've created. I will have more information about the actual crossing process in the next installment of Nursery Ramblings. Until next time . . .



'First Impression' x 'Everblooming Pillar 124'
'Everblooming Pillar 124' x unknown
'Chihuly' x 'Yellow Brick Road'