

The Garden of the Gods: A Home for the Rambler Collection

Pamela Temple

About nine years ago our garden covered 2½ acres planted intensively with roses, trees and other plants. The perimeter fence, erected to protect the garden from deer, was planted every inch with rambling and climbing roses. We began to think about adding an area for Ramblers that we could view from the house. When we were asked to foster the Rambler rose collection that now belongs to The Friends of Vintage Roses, we were thrilled. We live on 38 acres. It is a wild, isolated, and dramatic landscape in Northern California. It looks toward ridge after ridge heading out to the misty Mendocino coast 20 miles to the west. To me it seemed an ideal place for huge rambling roses.

After fencing in an area where I could keep the many potted new Ramblers protected, my husband Michael fenced in a much larger



A garden view (photo by G. Lowery)

area where most of them would be planted. We decided to call this “The Garden of the Gods”—I consider the Ramblers to be the Olympians among roses. It is a wonderful growing spot, a slope in



'Donau!' (photo by P. Temple)

full sun with a road running through. The soil is clay but with good drainage. Our water comes from springs and a pond we had dug for irrigation. I water the Ramblers by hand during the long dry summer. They are fertilized with feather meal and compost in the spring and with another dose of feather meal in the summer.

We wanted to grow many of the Ramblers freestanding and untamed. We planted some of the roses with lax growth habits so that they would tumble down the hill to the road. Some more

arching and upright ones we planted out in the field as haystacks and mountains. It is exciting to see a rose growing in this natural way.

For others of the more lax roses we have been busy building arches and small arbors out of long lengths of rebar. Two arched pieces are bound together to form what I have called "the wickets." Three pieces are used to make pup tent-shaped supports that I call "bloody huts."

In our rambling rose garden we now have a combination of large freestanding shrubs, loosely formal arches and arbors, and spreading mounds of roses tumbling down the banks to the road. A few tree-climbing varieties have begun their long, slow climb into old spreading oaks. Thanks to our dear friend and mentor Anne Belovich, who gave us many cuttings, the collection has expanded to around 350 roses.

It is hard for me to name favorites among roses. I simply love them all for their wonderful diversity. The wild exuberance of Ramblers makes them my favorite class. Many of them are also persistent survivors. It is amazing how a rose like 'Queen of the Belgians' can be such a delicate beauty and yet so tough. It is growing on a fence 15 feet in each direction. I haven't watered it for years now because I can't even find the base, and still it blooms in massive white clouds of blossoms. 'Paul's Himalayan Musk' is in this category also, and fragrant. When our old motorhome White Bear died on the driveway, being loath to part with it, we planted 'Paul's' on it. It has become a huge beautiful mountain.

Thanks to people who grew and collected Ramblers before me, I have roses from all over the world. Taking on the responsibility of preserving a collection of roses has changed my perspective on gardening. Previously I had focused on making a pretty garden. Now



the expansiveness of my garden provides a sanctuary. Having seen that such rose mountains want foothills to grow on, I began to believe we needed to do more. And I consider it my responsibility to provide for as many of these amazing rambling roses as I can on this hillside. As the world seems to grow smaller and smaller, finding a place for people to see these beautiful giants is very important to me. We all need these wild and exuberant beings. ■



'La Fraicheur' (left); 'Ile de France' (top); 'Long John Silver' (above)
(photos by D. Schramm)