

# ASK THE EXPERTS

By Marcia Sanchez-Walsh

*“How does a novice exhibitor start out? What tools do you recommend they start with, and what can be done to encourage members to start exhibiting roses in rose shows?”*

## **Sue Streeper**

I have been chairman of our Little Rose Show since 2006, and I would recommend a few things from the society's point of view that help the new members get started on exhibiting. There should be an article in the newsletter telling them what to bring (roses with as long a stem as possible, and with leaves, in water) and the information that there will be someone there to help them get going. That someone should bring their grooming box, because the novices will need to borrow its contents until they develop one of their own. That someone also should be alert to snag experienced exhibitors and ask them to help the novices when just the chairman is not enough. The rules (simple schedule) should have been published in the newsletter and should be available at the meeting also.

Sue Streeper  
ARS Judge  
ARS Consulting Rosarian  
San Diego Rose Society

## **Dr. Satish Prabhu**

How does a novice start exhibiting?

1. Plant a few rose bushes of exhibition varieties. Implement sound horticultural practices. By fall, he or she should have some roses worth exhibiting.
2. What tools to start with? Keep it very simple. A pair of secateurs. A sharp hobby knife. A pair of scissors to trim leaves and petals. A few Q-tips and cotton balls. A shoe mitt to shine leaves. Tags, rubber bands. A simple box to carry them in. Do not over emphasize grooming to beginners that will discourage more people than encourage them. Remember, if you work hard grooming a dog, you will get a well groomed dog. A great bloom will be a queen with minimal grooming.
3. What can be done to encourage members to start showing roses? A sure to succeed way! Every society has a seasoned exhibitor or two who have exhibited enough to be able to forego exhibiting personally for one show for the common good. Perhaps a current exhibitor unexpectedly has few or no roses this time to show. Have two of such exhibitors set up a table complete with two grooming boxes, vases filled with water, tags and pens. Simply tell the members you have identified as potential exhibitors to go into their gardens the evening before and cut any good looking roses they can find in their gardens, with fairly long stems. Look for roses that are about half open. Bring some sprays and OGR's too, if you have them. Bring them to these experts and they will help you exhibit them. When they arrive with their bucket of roses, quickly show them how to do minimal grooming (clean foliage, trim defective leaves, remove petals with streaks and color faults, label them and in they go into the novice section). Many blue ribbons

and a trophy or two will result, and there you have another new exhibitor! Give away three guidelines to judging roses as awards for the best novice HT, Floribunda Spray, Mini or OGR.

Dr. Satish Prabhu  
ARS Consulting Rosarian  
Exhibitor  
Columbia, S.C.

### **Dr. Craig Dorschel**

I first joined my rose society without the slightest notion that I would be exhibiting in rose shows, but once I got started I was hooked! I have three general pieces of advice for beginners:

- Don't be intimidated
- Ask questions
- Start small.

First, don't look at or think about the other roses and exhibitors. Just do it! Everyone was a beginner once. Make use of the Novice class, where your competition will be other beginners, not the experts.

Experienced exhibitors love to talk about roses and rose shows - except when they are busy prepping entries for a show. At any other time don't be afraid to ask questions concerning just about anything.

Finally, don't try to make too many entries at your first shows. You will become more skilled at preparing entries with experience and will be able to work faster, but at first plan on everything taking longer than expected. Also, I would suggest that you try not to do too much grooming at first until you develop your skills. It is possible to ruin a rose by attempting to do too much grooming.

For tools, I would suggest a starting tool kit to include a pruning clipper to cut stems, a small pair of scissors, one or two artists' brushes to remove debris from flowers, a damp cloth to clean leaves, something like a cotton swab to gently move petals (eventually this leads to use of many of these to position petals, but I did not try that my first show), and your choice of wedging material (I like green Styrofoam). You also need a black or blue ball point to fill out entry tags. Address labels or a rubber stamp really speed up this process. Last but not least, the show schedule and perhaps a reference such as the ARS handbook. Again, as you gain experience and learn from others, your grooming kit is likely to expand.

Your little shows are a great opportunity to get started. I would expect the other exhibitors to be less rushed and more available to give beginners some assistance. I'd also expect the judges to have more time to explain their decisions after the judging is complete. If a beginner's seminar is offered, go! You can learn quite a bit about staging entries and the rules (such as stem-on-stem) that can trip people up.

I've tried to keep this simple, and am not sure I've succeeded, but believe me; you will have fun and will get to hang out with great people. I guarantee you will never forget your first blue ribbon and your first trophy winner.

Dr. Craig Dorschel

ARS Judge  
ARS Consulting Rosarian  
New England Rose Society

**Jean Newman**

As a member and exhibitor of the Rose Society of Victoria, Australia, I thought your members may be interested in some humble “Aussie” advice which may be of equal relevance to novice exhibitors of your Society:

How does a novice exhibitor start out?

Firstly and most importantly, they become a member of their local Rose Society, where they will learn how to care for their roses in order to produce blooms of sufficient quality to give some reasonable chance of success. As a member, knowledge may then be gained by receiving regular Rose Society publications, attending monthly meetings (where interesting and knowledgeable speakers give of their time), use invaluable library facilities, join in discussions and form friendships with fellow rose growers and exhibitors.

Once the date of their Society’s Rose Show has been published, they need to request a copy of the Show Schedule, and a copy of the Judges’ Rule Book from the American Rose Society is also a good tool.

At rose shows in Australia, exhibitors would then need to diarize the date on which entries for the Show are to be received. This is extremely important as late entries are usually not allowed. Here in Victoria, notification of which items one is proposing to enter on the day of the Show have to be received about four days prior to that Show, thus allowing the Show Manager, on the day before the Show, to mark out the show benches, depending on the number of entries received for each section. Exhibitors in the USA will question how an exhibitor can know what will be available four days prior to a Show, but this knowledge is gained through experience and is not difficult to gauge – the only unknown being the weather of which we have no control – but by watching TV weather reports and making oneself aware of weather patterns leading up to a Show, one is able to judge the optimum time to cut blooms.

They could also attend a few local shows taking note of winning entries, photographing any of interest, and afterwards discussing the merits of those entries with the exhibitors concerned.

As a novice exhibitor, they are advised to try and settle on just a few sections of the Show in which to compete. Starting with a collection of say, a dozen roses and as they become more knowledgeable about growing and showing them, they could then gradually add to their collection. Growing roses is a long term interest so they need to be patient. If they are unsure which sections really interest them, they should try and concentrate on the Exhibition type sections, or the Old Garden Rose sections, rather than trying to compete in both. I would certainly recommend the OGR sections to novice exhibitors as blooms do not require the same level of high maintenance care, or the “grooming” that is required when showing Exhibition type blooms.

In relation to OGR sections, if they are unsure which roses bloom in both Spring and Autumn (to give themselves an opportunity to compete in both types of Show), they

should try and attend an Autumn Rose Show and make a note of those cultivars being exhibited – then purchase say half-a-dozen plants of the ones which they particularly like.

What Tools should they start out with?

- Felco Secateurs (or the very best they can afford!)
- Budding knife or pen-knife
- Wire cutters (wiring of roses is permitted in our State, but not in the U.S.)
- Pellets (made of different coloured sponge pieces) or cotton tips, for grooming purposes (these are carefully placed between bloom petals to form the circular outline required when showing Exhibition type blooms)
- Tweezers (to remove pellets from between petals prior to staging on the bench)
- Pointed nail scissors to remove small spent stalks etc.
- Soft haired paint brushes (different sizes) to gently clean petals
- Cotton balls to wipe foliage clean (rules don't allow oil to be used to clean foliage)
- Pen and labels (to assist with identifying roses at the time of cutting and prior to placing in a bucket of tepid water to which a commercial plant food has been added)
- Measuring tape (to ensure they are within the constraints of their section space as there are rules in Australia as to size in some classes, but not in the U.S.)
- Spray bottle (to freshen up their blooms, particularly prior to judging in Australia). In the U.S., no added substance, including water, is allowed on the rose, or foliage.
- "Oasis" (or some other moisture retaining material) for use in vases and displays, when allowed in the rules.
- Camera to photograph their entries and a pen and notepad to keep a record of winning entries, or any information which they may glean from fellow exhibitors and judges etc. on the day of the Show.

What can be done to encourage members to start showing roses?

- Hold Show Preparation and Judging School events at least on an annual basis so that all new members have the opportunity to learn from more experienced exhibitors and judges.
- Include entries specifically for novice exhibitors in any Show Schedule.
- Arrange for an experienced exhibitor to assist novice exhibitors with any difficulties or queries they may have on the morning of the Show.
- At monthly meetings spend, say, 15 minutes discussing at least one item from the Show Schedule giving a demonstration of how a rose(s) in this section should be exhibited, so that a novice does not feel completely out of his or her depth.
- Have a judge give a demonstration of how that item would be judged and what, if any, improvements could be made to make it a winning entry (e.g. correct length of stem, rules concerning side stems etc.).
- Provide useful articles in Rose Society bulletins/annuals specifically geared for novice exhibitors e.g. rose culture notes covering pruning, spraying, mulching, and in relation to showing: disbudding, cutting, storing, transporting blooms etc. (the Los Angeles Rose Society Bulletins are excellent in this regard). Remember too that what may be commonplace for experienced exhibitors ought to be simplified for novices – i.e. spraying plants once a month rather than weekly, so that novice exhibitors aren't deterred by what appears to be a time-consuming task, which it would be if they were to spray on a weekly basis – that alone could discourage novices from exhibiting!
- Provide "encouragement" awards/certificates as an incentive to show roses at Society Rose Shows, not just a 1<sup>st</sup> Prize, but a 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize as well, in recognition of the efforts of that novice, and to encourage a "try again" effort.

- Judges could write positive and helpful comments on the back of Show entry cards to help novice exhibitors improve their chances of success at any future Shows.

Finally, my advice to novice exhibitors is not to try and win at all costs. They should do their very best they possibly can to grow good roses, make every effort to enter at least some of their roses (their Society will appreciate their efforts) and if they win, they win, and if they lose, they lose. They should not be discouraged because the experience itself is fulfilling and they will get a real buzz from having competed. They should show humility in success and graciousness in defeat. They should never question a judge's decision and never put in a formal protest even if their Rules allow it. They may lose one prize that day but they will gain the respect of many thereafter. And remember, there is always another Show, and another and another ...

So to all you budding novices, have Fun, and Good Luck!!

Jean Newman  
International Rose Judge