

## Roses of New Zealand

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### INTRODUCTION

New Zealand has a very strong gardening culture based on its English heritage, mild climate and fertile soils. One of the most popular cultivated plants are cultivars and species of the genus *Rosa* which are grown for their wide variety of flower colours and forms, plant types and that many are also fragrant.

New Zealand has no native *Rosa* species; rather all species and cultivars present have either been introduced to New Zealand or have been bred here. The first recorded introduction of roses to New Zealand were by the missionaries in the early 1800's. *Rosa chinensis var semperflorens* also known as 'Slaters Crimson China' was introduced in 1814 with *Rosa rubiginosa* 'Sweet Briar' introduced between 1815 and 1820. The former is still grown in gardens today; the latter unfortunately is now a weed in parts of New Zealand.

While many private residences had roses in their gardens from early settlement, the first public rose garden was established in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens in 1910

and still exists today. Most towns and cities around New Zealand today have public plantings of roses.

Nurseries grew roses from the middle of the 1800's to meet the demand for plants for private gardens. It was easy to import new varieties from overseas breeders in this period and with the country still in the early stages of its development, there was little need to develop new cultivars in New Zealand. In fact, very little happened in the way of rose breeding up until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first rose breeder of note was William Lippiatt (1863 – 1941) who ran a large rose nursery in Auckland and imported new varieties from leading European breeders. Sadly, it seems none of his varieties exist today.

With the rose becoming popular, the National Rose Society of New Zealand (now known as the New Zealand Rose Society) was founded in 1931. Its motto is still the same today as it was then 'To implant the rose in the hearts and gardens of the people'.

Like many organisations in New Zealand today, the membership of the rose society is much smaller than in its heyday due to changes in society, but the passion remains as strong as ever. A separate group, Heritage Roses New Zealand was formed in 1980 and is mostly dedicated to conserving heritage roses so they are not lost to New Zealand.

Early rose trials were established in Auckland, Morrinsville and at Massey Agricultural College in Palmerston North but for

various reasons, none of these survived more than a few years. In 1969, the New Zealand Rose Society established International Rose Trials in the newly developed Dugald Mackenzie Rose Garden in Palmerston North with strong support given from the Palmerston North City Council. This was the first international rose trials established in the southern hemisphere and tests un-released roses from New Zealand and international breeders over a two-year period.



**Figure 1.** The New Zealand Rose Society Trials, Palmerston North.

In 1990, the Auckland Rose of the Year trial was established at the Auckland Botanic Garden. This focused on varieties already in commerce and was judged on one day a year.

In 2001, the trials moved to the Rogers Rose Garden in Hamilton and were rebranded as the New Zealand Rose of the Year.

## ROSE BREEDING IN NEW ZEALAND

There have been many roses bred in New Zealand, the large majority by amateur breeders who have created them as a hobby rather than as a commercial operation. The domestic market is seen as too small as to make a living from breeding roses so breeders need to crack overseas markets to have any chance of making a reasonable income from rose breeding – a difficult task with strong competition from other breeders, cost and plant import rules among the barriers. But it is not impossible, and some breeders have managed to have varieties commercialised in other parts of the world. The following are some of the breeders who are currently active along with some significant breeders who have made a contribution to rose breeding in New Zealand.

### Sam McGredy

Arguably, New Zealand's greatest rose breeder, Sam McGredy immigrated to New Zealand in 1972 from Northern Ireland. He brought to New Zealand the reputation as one of the best rose breeders in the world and only enhanced this once here. He also freely shared his knowledge with other rose breeders and brought international exposure to roses in New Zealand. Sam also lobbied successfully for the introduction of Plant Variety Rights (PVR) legislation which was passed into law in 1975. It was only fitting that a McGredy variety 'Matangi' (Macman) was the first plant to be protected under the legislation.



**Figure 2.** Sam McGredy.

Sam was a very innovative breeder and among his roses created were the 'creepy crawly' groundcovers such as 'Snow Carpet' (Maccarpe), 'hand-painted' roses such as 'Picasso' (Macpic), 'Old Master' (Macesp) and 'Rock N Roll' (Macfirwal); and striped roses such as 'Oranges N Lemons' (Macoranlem), 'Michelangelo' (Mactemaik) and 'Hurdy Gurdy' (Macpluto).



**Figure 3.** Rosa 'Oranges N Lemons' (Macoranlem).

He also bred the traditional Hybrid Tea's, Floribunda's and Climber's which sold well including 'Aotearoa' (Macgenev), 'Paddy Stephens' (Macclack), 'Solitaire' (Macyefre), 'Sexy Remy' (Macrexy), 'Trumpeter' (Mactru), 'Bantry Bay', 'Dublin Bay' (Macdub) and 'Schoolgirl'. A range of compact free flowering miniature roses were often given New Zealand place names such as 'Kaikoura' (Macwalla), 'Wanaka' (Macinca) and 'Kapiti' (Macglemil).



**Figure 4.** Rosa 'Aotearoa' (Macgenev).

Sam was also a very astute businessman and often roses were named for a particular person or product. The most successful of Sam's roses in this aspect was 'Olympiad' (Macauck) which was the official rose of the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. 750000 plants were propagated in that year alone.



**Figure 5.** Rosa 'Olympiad' (Macauck).

Among the many roses named for products or causes were 'Auckland Metro' (Macbucpal), 'Arthur Bell', 'Mulland Jubilee', 'Matawhero Magic' (Macamster) and 'Massey University' (Macwhitba). Well known people who Sam named rose for were 'Picasso' (Macpic), 'Violet Carson' (Macio), 'Elizabeth of Glamis' (Macel) and 'Ginger Rogers' while those for New Zealand celebrities included 'Maggie Barry' (Macoborn), 'Susan Devoy' (Macreno) and 'Paul Holmes' (Macwyom).

Sam McGredy retired from rose breeding in 1991 but continued to support and encourage other New Zealand rose breeders right up until his passing on August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019 aged 87.

## Nola Simpson & John Ford

A computer scientist by profession, Nola had a lifelong interest in roses. She took up rose breeding in the 1970's after marrying her husband John Simpson, a well-known amateur rose breeder whose rose 'Velvet Lustre' was always Nola's favourite. Upon his passing in 1977, she decided to carry on his work.



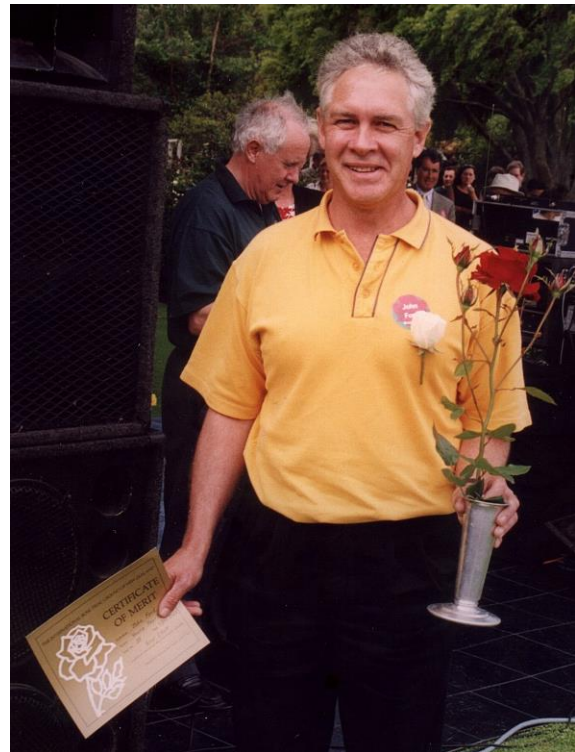
**Figure 6.** Nola Simpson.

Nola loved breeding roses with good shape to the blooms so they could be used for exhibition in rose shows in New Zealand. Among those created for this purpose were 'Silky Mist' (Simsilko), 'Reflections' (Simref) and 'Snow Queen' (Simseen). Nola also loved breeding roses that had novel coloured blooms and became world renown for her world with roses in the brown shades. Her most well known rose was 'Hot Chocolate' (Simchoco) while 'Chocolate Prince' (Simchoka) and 'Chocolate Ripples (Simstripe), the latter two having been released by Meilland International in France.



**Figure 7.** Rosa 'Hot Chocolate' (Simchoco).

Nola passed away in 2011 but her nephew John Ford, a well-known rosarian in his own right, is continuing Nolas work. Among the roses he has released so far include 'Southern Beauty' (Forauty), 'Caramel Swirl' (Forusty) and 'Simply Gorgeous' (Formai).



**Figure 8.** John Ford.



**Figure 9.** Rosa 'Caramel Swirl' (Forrusty).

### **Rob Somerfield**

Rob has had a lifelong interest in roses and started breeding them in 1983. In the mid 1990's, he along with wife Linda started Glenavon Roses near Tauranga which supplies rose plants around New Zealand.



**Figure 10.** Rob Somerfield.

Rob's first commercial release was 'Blackberry Nip' in 1998, a rose that created much interest in New Zealand. Rob aims to breed very healthy plants that also have masses of flower and have a compact habit. Some of Rob's most well-known roses are 'Sky Tower' (Somskywer), 'White Romance' (Somgle01) 'Lemon N Lime' (Sombeethree), 'Little Miss Perfect' (Somgle07), 'Pacific Glory' (Somlinone), 'Looking Good' (Somannmac) and 'Wild Cherry' (Somredsky). Rob has an interest in breeding green roses and his 2020 release 'Green with Envy' (Sompounamu) is the culmination of his work so far.



**Figure 11.** Rosa 'Green with Envy' (Sompounamu).

### **Bob Matthews**

Bob was born into roses with his parents establishing Matthews Nurseries near Wanganui in 1947. Bob and his wife Cath took over in 1978 and it continues to be one of the leading rose nurseries in New Zealand. Bob began breeding in the 1990's with his first commercial release 'Anniversary' (Mattlace) in 1997 celebrating the nurseries 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



**Figure 12.** Bob Matthews.

He is committed to producing roses that can be grown without spraying for pests and diseases. Some of Bob's well known roses include 'Akaroa' (Mattanstill), 'Catherine' (Mattlaslo), 'Diamonds Forever' (Mattdiafor), 'Lest we Forget' (Mattzac), 'Platinum' (Mattmilano) and 'St Pauls Cathedral' (Mattcan). He has also developed 'My Mum' (Mattmum) which was named for his mother which has now lead to the 'My Rose' collection of roses which now includes 'My Dad' (Mattmaf), 'My Grandma' (Mattlewanna) and 'My Treasure' (Mattamb).



**Figure 13.** Rosa 'My Mum' (Mattmum).

### Mike Athy

Mike began breeding roses in the mid 1990's near Gisborne and aims to create free flowering, healthy garden plants.

His roses are probably more well-known overseas than in New Zealand with agents in Africa, South America and Europe. One of his varieties 'The Daisy Rose' (Athyfaala) won five awards at the Biltmore Rose Trials in North Carolina in 2013. Among Mike's other creations are 'My Love' (Athypacross), 'Thank You' (Athyou), 'Hi Ho Silver' (Athysumo) and 'Caroline Bay' (Athybay).



**Figure 14.** Rosa "Hi Ho Silver" (Athysumo).

### Doug Grant

Doug is a plant breeder specialising in breeding Pumpkins and Onions based at Pukekohe. He also breeds roses and aims to breed healthy roses that can handle the humidity that the Upper North Island experiences. His first commercial release was 'Millennium' (Gralove) named for the Year 2000 celebrations. He has also bred a series of compact climbers including 'All My Love' (Grakita), 'Candy Kisses' (Graemma) and 'Cherry Kisses' (Grachloe) which are suited for growing in smaller gardens.



**Figure 15.** Doug Grant with Rosa ‘Cherry Kisses’ (Grachloe).

## **SUMMARY**

Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, many fine roses have been created by New Zealand rose breeders and this paper has just given a short preview of some of the breeders and their creations. With roses continuing to be one of the most popular cultivated ornamental plants in New Zealand, there will be many more new varieties developed by breeders for years to come. We look forward to their future creations.