Roses for the home garden
Roses are one of the most popular garden plants in the world due to the diversity of plant form, flower color, and fragrance. Today, there are thousands of named rose cultivars which can make selecting the right one for your garden a challenge. That said, the choice becomes easier if repeat bloom, winterhardiness, and disease tolerance are desired.

Most gardeners prefer a rose that will bloom repeatedly throughout the growing season. If this is important, stay away from roses that bloom only once. There are several roses that will not survive our winter conditions unless they are protected by utilizing the Minnesota tip method or covering with ample amounts of mulch. If this does not sound appealing, look for roses that are known to survive over winter. Keep in mind that a repeat blooming rose can suffer some cane dieback and still bloom. These roses will form flowers on new growth and if the rose regrows vigorously in the spring and flowers, it will make an excellent addition to the garden.

Roses are susceptible to several foliar diseases that result in the loss of foliage. One of the most important foliar diseases of roses is black spot. Repeated foliage loss from black spot will reduce plant size, vigor, and the ability to survive over winter. Also, a rose with no leaves is not very attractive. Although fungicides and sanitation can control black spot, these control measures add extra time and money into the maintenance of the rose. To avoid extra maintenance costs, choose roses that are known to be tolerant of black spot.

Given the thousands of rose cultivars, it should not come as a shock that there are several that have repeat bloom, winterhardiness, and disease tolerance. In fact, many roses can thrive given only basic plant care. For example, the Earth-Kind® Environmental Landscape Management System, developed by Texas A&M, has conducted rose cultivar evaluations since the 1990’s. The Earth-Kind® trialing protocol is strict, roses receive minimal or no supplemental irrigation (except during establishment), no synthetic fertilizer (other than compost worked into the soil before planting), no pesticides for disease or insect control, no deadheading, and no winter protection during the trial.

Currently, Texas A&M has identified 21 rose cultivars that thrive when grown under low input conditions. Seeing the success of Earth-Kind® rose trialing by Texas A&M, Dr. David Zlesak, Associate Professor of Horticulture, University of Wisconsin, River Falls, established the Northern Earth-Kind® Rose Trial in 2007. During 2008, a trial site for the Northern Earth-Kind® Rose Trial was established in Moorhead at Centennial Dog Park, becoming one of five sites in the U.S. The other four sites are in Rosemount, MN; Ames, IA; Haysville, KS; and Commerce, TX. The trial evaluated 20 rose cultivars with each rose being represented four times in the trial. The Moorhead trial collected data during the 2010-2012 growing seasons. After the trial was completed and the data was analyzed,
six of the 20 cultivars tested were identified as being in the top 50% of roses, based on their horticulture rating, at each of the three north-central U.S. trial sites; Moorhead, MN; Rosemount, MN; and Ames, IA (Zlesak, et al., 2017). The horticultural rating was determined by the quality and quantity of foliage and flowers as well as plant habit and vigor. The six roses are: ‘Frontenac,’ ‘Lena,’ ‘Ole,’ ‘Polar Joy,’ ‘Sunrise and Sunset,’ and ‘Sven’, (Figs. 1-6).

Figure 1. Frontenac growing at Centennial Dog Park, Moorhead, MN. Photo taken June 2011. Credit: R. Nelson, UMN Extension.

Figure 2. Northern Accents™ Lena (BAI lena) growing at Centennial Dog Park, Moorhead, MN. Photo taken June 2012. Credit: R. Nelson, UMN Extension.
Figure 3. Northern Accents™ Ole (BAIole) growing at Centennial Dog Park, Moorhead, MN. Photo taken June 2012. Credit: R. Nelson, UMN Extension.

Figure 4. Polar Joy (BAIore) growing at Centennial Dog Park, Moorhead, MN. Photo taken June 2012. Credit: R. Nelson, UMN Extension.
Other rose cultivars that were in the top 50% of performers at the Moorhead, MN location only were: ‘John Cabot’, ‘Quadra’, and ‘William Baffin’ (Figs. 7-9).
Figure 7. John Cabot growing at Centennial Dog Park, Moorhead, MN. Photo taken June 2012. Credit: R. Nelson, UMN Extension.

Figure 8. John Davis growing at Centennial Dog Park, Moorhead, MN. Photo taken June 2012. Credit: R. Nelson, UMN Extension.
The roses listed above would make a great addition to any landscape. Please give me a call at the University of Minnesota Extension office, Clay County at 218-299-7338, 1-800-299-5020 or by email nels1657@umn.edu for more information about the roses I talked about or other roses that will work in your landscape.

References