



Rosa chinensis spontanea (pink form)

Rosa gigantea

Photos by Yoshihiro Ueda

Singularly Beautiful Roses

A Publication Dedicated to Single, Nearly Single, and Semi-Double Flowered Roses

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Chineesche Eglantier Roosen: A Glimpse at Several Lightly Petaled Red Chinas

“The ferocious tigers of Bengal and hideous crocodiles of the Ganges are known to lie in wait for their prey in the thickets of the Ever-Flowering Rose (*Rosa semperflorens*), whose foliage is evergreen and whose pretty red flowers bloom continuously. It also exists in China.”

(Pierre Boitard, *Manuel Complet de l'Amateur de Roses*, 1836, 2, 3.)

The China roses familiar to today's rose growers are the result of more than a thousand years of mutation, intercrossing, and selection in the gardens of China. In contrast to the species roses from which they are derived, *Rosa chinensis* var. *spontanea*, *Rosa odorata*, *Rosa gigantea*, etc., they differ in having smaller stature and the capacity to rebloom throughout the growing season.

The westward spread of the species and the remontant hybrids featured in this article began sometime in the mid to late 18th century, likely via India, Mauritius, and modern day Reunion. In 1733 Dutch botanist Jan Frederik Gronovius (1600-1700) labeled a rose in his herbarium, “Chineesche Eglantier Roosen” (“red Chinese wild rose”). Whether it was originally acquired as a dried specimen or from a collection of live plants is unknown. In 1768 Nikolaus J. Jaquin published a botanical description of Gronovius' specimen in volume three of his *Observationum Botanicarum* and gave it the name *Rosa chinensis* (7). Its color was given as “Swiss red.”

A representative of Captain Gilbert Slater, an East India Company director, observed a red, monthly-flowering China in a Canton nursery and had it shipped back to England ca. 1789 on one of the voyages regularly financed by Slater. Because Slater generously shared his new plant acquisitions, the rose was named ‘Slater's Crimson China’ shortly after his untimely death in 1793. The following year, publisher William Curtis featured a botanical description and an illustration of the new rose, *Rosa semperflorens*, in a December issue of *The Botanical Magazine* (Vol. XIII, December, 1794, 284.).



Rosa semperflorens
The Botanical Magazine

“For this invaluable acquisition, our country is indebted to the late Gilbert Slater, Esq. of Knots-Green, near Laytonstone, [sic] whose untimely death every person must deplore, who is a friend to improvements in ornamental gardening: in procuring the rarer plants from abroad, more particularly from the East-Indies, Mr. Slater was indefatigable, nor was he less anxious to have them in the greatest perfection this country will admit; to gain this point there was no contrivance that ingenuity could suggest, no labour, no expense withheld; such exertions must soon have insured him the first collection of the plants of India: it is now about three years since he obtained this rose from China; as he readily imparted his most valuable acquisitions to those who were most likely to increase them, this plant soon became conspicuous in the collections of the principal Nurserymen near town, and in the course of a few years will, no doubt, decorate the window of every amateur.”

The rose's blooms were described as semi-double, crimson colored, and as having a delightful fragrance. Plants were grown in greenhouses and described as not exceeding three feet in height.



Rosa chinensis semperflorens

Photo unattributed

‘Slater’s Crimson China’ subsequently found its way to France, Austria, Germany, and Italy before the end of the 19th century, to New Zealand by 1814, and Australia by 1858. Nurserymen quickly began raising seedlings. In his 1820 publication, *Rosarum Monographia*, John Lindley relates that “many splendid varieties with semi-double crimson flowers” were familiar to British gardeners, and that others, “still more beautiful,” were being raised in France.

There exists no means of verifying that what is currently in commerce as ‘Slater’s Crimson China’ is actually the rose mentioned in the literature. Sources suggest that it was likely displaced by hybrids and possibly lost to commerce in the west. However, in 1953 a rose that was a potential candidate was observed growing at Belfield Estate in Somerset, Bermuda.

“One of the most exciting events in the early days of the [Bermuda] Society was the positive identification in 1956 by Mr. Richard Thomson of *R. chinensis semperflorens* or ‘Slater’s Crimson China’, better known to Bermudians as the “Belfield” rose. Mr. Thomson, Chairman of the Old Rose Committee of the American Rose Society at that time, found the rose growing at Belfield in Somerset in 1953 and was quoted as having said that at first he could not believe his eyes. He felt like an art collector who had “just unearthed a long-missing Rembrandt”. After three years of intensive research, he finally confirmed his original opinion.”(*Old Garden Roses in Bermuda*, 1984, 9.)

Eventually, a number of ‘Slater’s Crimson China’ contenders were studied in the laboratory. DNA findings revealed that the various specimens marketed as *R. chinensis semperflorens* and/or ‘Slater’s Crimson China’ had different ploidy levels (*Analysis of Genetic Diversity and Relationships in the China Rose Group*, 36-37.). The rose identified as “Belfield”/‘Slater’s Crimson China’ in Bermuda was revealed to be triploid and distinct from other similarly named samples with one exception – a found rose from California named “Ferndale Red China.” One example of *R. chinensis semperflorens* collected from China (where it is known as ‘Yue yuehong’) was found to be so closely related to ‘Old Blush’ that it appears to be a color sport (or vice versa).

“Red Chinas are such a closely related group that it is a great challenge sorting them out.”

Gregg Lowery

The difficulty noted above was recognized as early as 1815 by horticulturist William Curtis; “Several varieties of *Rosa semperflorens*, differing in size, colour, and scent, have, within these few years, found their way into the different collections about town, and have generally been represented as fresh importations from China; we believe, however, that most of them have been raised from seed here” (*Curtis’s Botanical Magazine*, vol. 42, 1815, 1762.).

In 1809 Henry Andrews (*Roses: Or a Monograph of the Genus Rosa*) gave the name *R. semperflorens simplex* to a red, single-flowered China that he first saw in the Brompton nursery of Reginald Whitley.

Numerous illustrations featured in major horticultural publications, including that of this rose, had been created from plant specimens at the Whitley nursery. Whitley often received seeds and plants from numerous overseas sources, including Elizabeth Gwillim, a well-known amateur collector and botanical artist that lived in Madras (modern day Chennai). Perhaps this was the China connection (<https://thegwillimproject.com/natural-history/botany/>)?

Contemporary thinking places this single-flowered China in what is referred to as the “‘Sanguinea’ group.” The word “group” is used to indicate there are several red, single-flowered Chinas currently in commerce that are potential candidates for the rose in question. In 1824 a rose referred to as ‘Sanguinea’ was listed in a unique catalog of plants compiled by British plantsman Robert Morris (*The Botanist’s Manuel*, 1824, 41). Although dark red is given as the color; no reference is made to its petal count or origin. Was it a Latinized reference to the ‘Bengale Sanguine’ mentioned above or another red China? Currently, the source falls under the single-flowered ‘Sanguinea’ group references on www.helpmefind/roses.com.

A rose currently marketed as “Sanguinea/in commerce as” was initially collected and labeled ‘Bengal Crimson’ by plant hunter Nancy Lindsay. During the late 1930’s and early 1940’s she traveled several times to modern day Iran collecting plants for the British Museum. Many of her finds were initially planted at the Cote d’Azur home of friend and garden designer Maj. Lawrence Johnston, but eventually found their way to England’s Kew Gardens during WWII. Graham Thomas was then able to acquire them from Kew and get them into the nursery trade. He would eventually refer to ‘Bengal Crimson’ as a “strong growing single crimson variety of great garden value” (*The Graham Stuart Thomas Rose Book*, 1994, 126.) The height is often listed as four feet or more.



‘Sanguinea’ - Photo courtesy Rose Barni



Rosa semperflorens simplex
Roses: or a Monograph of the Genus *Rosa*

Thomas mentions another single red China as having been in his possession for a number of years named ‘Miss Lowe’s Variety.’ It has been known by that name since 1887, when a painting of the rose done by a Miss Lowe was featured in *The Garden: an Illustrated Weekly Journal of Gardening in All its Branches* (Vol. 32, August 13, 1887, 128.). Dr. William Henry Lowe, a resident of Wimbledon Park (*British Medical Journal*, Obituaries, September 8, 1900, 700) is said to have shared it with self-taught botanist E. A.

Bowles, who in turn shared it with Graham Thomas. [Ed. note; Miss Ella Lowe, perhaps Dr. Lowe's daughter, is listed as a resident of Woodcote in Wimbledon and as an exhibitor of a painting of azaleas by the Royal Academy of Arts in 1889 (Graves, Algernon, *Royal Academy of the Arts: a Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their Work from its Foundation in 1769 to 1904*, Vol. V, 1906, 98.) Although there has been speculation that it is a dwarf sport or reversion of 'Slater's Crimson China,' lab analysis has shown that there is strong Tea influence in its genetic profile. It is generally agreed that this rose is distinct, rarely growing above two feet in height and having flowers that some consider slightly lighter in color.

A dark red five petaled China rose grown in Australia has been given the name "Rookwood China." Photos on helpmefindroses.com show it be a large plant, more consistent with the description of the 'Bengal Crimson/Sanguinea.' Nineteenth century Australian rose catalogs reveal that a rose named 'Sanguinea' was available to growers in that country, however those catalogs offered no information as to its petal count.



'Miss Lowe's Variety'
The Garden: an Illustrated Weekly ...



"Rookwood China"
Photo by Margaret Furness

Three very similarly described roses appeared in the ensuing years. Andrews is the source for a rose imported from China around 1810. Initially sold as the "Blue Rose" and at quite an exorbitant price, growers soon discovered the color of its eight to ten petaled blooms to be a dark purplish red. Andrews named it *R. indica purpurea* and it appears to be in commerce as 'Indica Purpurea.' 'Bengale Pourpre,' also purplish red but with single flowers, first appeared in a catalog published by nurseryman François Cels in 1817. Another 'Bengale Pourpre' is listed as an 1828 introduction by Jean Pierre Vibert. It and the Cels' China have, however, been merged on helpmefind.com/roses. All three are stated to be purplish red and compact growing; taking into consideration that their names can simply be translated as "Purple China," distinguishing them from one another appears a daunting challenge.

To further complicate matters, French rose grower Raymond Chenault

introduced a purplish red single-flowered seedling in 1930 he named 'Purpurea.' Early sources claim a compact habit. There is some speculation that a found rose distributed as "Winecup" may be the Chenault seedling. For me, "Winecup" stays below three feet; however, California growers have found it to be much more upright.

History tells us that a dazzling scarlet semi-double seedling appeared in a bed of mixed remontant hybrids raised by Jacques Plantier in 1825. Jean Pierre Vibert released it in 1836 as ‘Gloire des Rosomanes,’ loosely translated as “Glory of the Rose Maniacs.” Its ability to bloom throughout the growing season, particularly in the fall garnered the rose praise of the highest order. Its perfumed blossoms, sometimes described as having an untidy form, arrive in small clusters on a bush that grows six to twelve feet or more in height. Reddish filaments add to the appeal of the flowers. The variety is clearly a hybrid of mixed ancestry; some see more China influence (color and tenderness) and some believe Bourbon genes are more clearly evident (fragrance and habit of growth).



“Do you know Gloire de Rosaméne? It is an abundant bloomer, and its flowers are cupped, large, semi-double, and of a brilliant deep scarlet. One dewy morning we saw it open its deep eyes and put to shame, with its intense, and penetrating, and reticent gaze, the shallow classification of the mere man of science.” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, July 1876, 435.



In 1906 a California reference appears referring to the rose as ‘Ragged Robin.’ For years it was used as an understock due to its vigor. Herb Swim relates the story of how ‘Dr. Huey’ was mistakenly substituted for ‘Ragged Robin’ in California’s growing fields in the 1947 *American Rose Annual* (151-152) and eventually supplanted it. Although not often deliberately planted in modern gardens, the significance of ‘Gloire des Rosomanes’ in the history of rose breeding is evidenced by the reporting of almost 17,000 unique descendants on helpmefind/roses.com.



Upper Right: ‘Pourpre’ - Photo by Raymond Loubert

Middle Right: “Winecup” - Photo by Jeri Jennings

Lower Right: ‘Gloire des Rosomanes’ -
Photo by Stephen Hoy



'Fabvier' - Photo courtesy of Shout Wiki

A shorter growing red China bred by Jean Laffay and released in Europe ca. 1832 is currently marketed as 'Fabvier.' Laffay dedicated it to General Charles Fabvier, who served as an officer under Napoleon and as a politician and ambassador. Its semi-double flowers are scarlet red, often showing a white streak. Many find it to have a light fragrance. Friend and heritage rose enthusiast Darrell Schramm has written; "It's little, it's lovely, it's rarely out of bloom. 'Fabvier' lifts its face unabashed to sun and mist and rain . . . undaunted and full of cheer." In 1984 rose rustlers Pam Puryear and Bill Welch caught sight of a bright red rose growing in a Navasota, Texas garden. After enquiring of the elderly home owner they collected cuttings and named the found rose "Martha Gonzales" on behalf of the generous homeowner. Lab research has shown "Martha

Gonzales" to be identical to 'Fabvier.' The same study revealed another very similar looking found rose, "Old Gay Hill Red China," (discovered growing in Old Gay Hill, TX near the site of Thomas Affleck's nursery) to be a taller growth sport of 'Fabvier.'

French hybridizer Jacques Hémeray was the creator of the relatively modern 'Papa Hémeray.' Formally introduced in 1912, it resulted from a cross of the Michael Walsh climber 'Hiawatha' and 'Old Blush. Its five petaled flowers are smallish, rosy red with a vivid white eye, and appear in dramatic clusters throughout the growing season. One 1913 source states that, "One could say that it is both a China and a dwarf 'Hiawatha' (*Journal des Roses*, September 1, 1913, 145.). It is sometimes referred to as "Baby Hiawatha" because of its compact habit of growth.



'Papa Hémeray' - Photo unattributed

Two Bermuda Mystery roses also enter the picture in the 20th century. The first was named "Vincent Godsiff" for the owner of the property on which it was found growing. Some hint of its origin may be tied to the property's previous owner, William Stanley Doe (1856-1918), known to have been a florist. The plant is compact, growing to three feet, and has rose red blooms of fifteen or so petals. Although nothing further of its provenance is known, its China characteristics are clearly evident.

In 1965 Bermuda rose grower Elizabeth Ball recorded that she was growing an unidentified single purple red China. It would eventually be named "St. David's" for its found location, St. David's Island at the northeast tip of Bermuda. With its color, white eye, and China foliage and habit it was thought to closely



“Vincent Godsiff”
Photo San Jose Heritage Rose Garden



“St. David's”
Photo unattributed

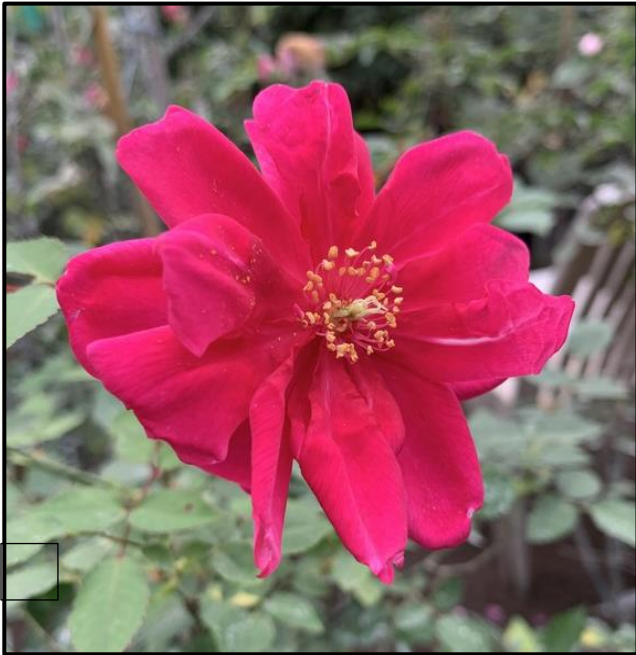
resemble ‘Fabvier’ despite having fewer petals. DNA analysis has revealed it is indeed closely related but not identical.

Japanese botanist and plant collector Mikinori Ogisu is well known for having discovered a variety of flora native to Japan and China. In the rose world he is recognized for having found/rediscovered *R. spontanea* growing in the wild in 1983. Among a number of other roses he has discovered are ‘Yuki’s Dream,’ ‘Qin Yuan Blush Tea-Scented China,’ and ‘Komachi.’ The last of these three is a compact growing plant with red semi-double blooms featuring a prominent white eye. Girija Viraraghavan tells the story of meeting Mr. Ogisu in 2005 at an international rose meeting in Osaka, Japan. He had brought a small stem of the red China with him explaining that it was one of many found growing wild in China that were unknown to the western world. With Ogisu’s permission, Viru and Girija carried the stem home to India and were able to successfully bud from it. Originally given the name ‘Edo Crimson,’ it was renamed ‘Komachi’ to honor a famed Japanese poet of historic importance.



‘Komachi’
Photo by Viru & Girija Viraraghavan

The last of the roses included in our narrative is one bred by Viru Viraraghavan in 2007. His interest



in breeding warm climate roses led to creating numerous hybrids with *R. gigantea* and *R. clinophylla*. Using 'The Rose of the Temple of Ten Thousand Camellias' and the latter of the above two mentioned species, Viru created a new race of Chinas named the Nymph Series, all possessing "an aura of impishness and a frolicking naughtiness that one usually attributes to a nymph!" The deepening of color associated with the Chinas remains a strong feature of this series of hybrids with the added characteristic of quilled petals and a unique fragrance. Among this group is a rose that was named 'Bhavani Nymph' after one of India's major rivers. It has twelve to fifteen bright red petals and is described as having a spicy fragrance. Plant material was shared with Helga Brichet and will hopefully get to the U.S. in the near future.

'Bhavani Nymph'

Photo by Viru & Girija Viraraghavan

"St. David's" - Photo by my friend Al Whitcomb



Sally Holmes - A Classic!

As a new rose grower in the 1980's I remember having to learn that some roses that grow like climbers aren't actually classified as climbers. 'Sparrieshoop' and 'Dortmund' come to mind as rose varieties I was seeing at shows at the time, roses I wanted to add to my garden, but that I learned grow quite large here in the southern United States and require careful placement. And then along came 'Sally Holmes.'

'Sally Holmes' was bred by amateur British hybridizer Robert Holmes in 1976 and introduced in Britain by Fryer's Roses. Some background information recently appeared on Face Book about the rose, its name, and the hybridizer. Robert and Sally Holmes married in 1944 and briefly lived in Yorkshire before settling in Stockport, Cheshire. Robert, a schoolmaster by profession, began hybridizing roses sometime in the 60's. One of his early hybrids, a 1967 Royal National



'Sally Holmes' - Photo by Dr. Giuseppe Mazza



'Fred Loads'

Created from a cross of 'Ivory Fashion' and 'Ballerina' and registered as a Shrub, 'Sally Holmes' features ivory to pale apricot, five to ten petaled blooms that may pick up pink tints in cooler weather. The lightly scented flowers can potentially arrive in massive sprays on a plant that will grow anywhere from six to twelve feet in height and width. The volume of bloom is frequently absolutely breathtaking. 'Sally Holmes' won a trial ground certificate in Britain, a certificate

Rose Society gold medal winner, was the once very familiar 'Fred Loads.' Its almost single, coral orange blooms arrive in large trusses throughout the season on a shrub that behaves like a Floribunda in cooler climates but grows to substantial proportions in more mild regions. Although it garnered a fair degree of commercial success, he saved his best for his wife.



'Sally Holmes' - Photo by Star Roses

of merit in Belfast, gold medals from trials in Monza, Baden Baden, and Portland, and was elected to the World Federation of Rose Societies Hall of Fame in 2012. Another measure of its popularity is apparent when one discovers it is commercially in North and South America, Europe, Russia, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Indeed a classic!

“For if delight may provoke men’s labor, what greater delight is there than to behold the earth appareled with plants, as a robe of embroidered work, set with orient pearls and garnished with a diversity of rare and costly jewels?”

– John Gerard

From the Editor

A comment about this newsletter’s first article – the red Chinas. My original intent was to write an article about “all” the red Chinas potentially in commerce. Gregg Lowery’s comment about the challenge in sorting them out should have been a warning taken more seriously. Beyond the actual registered varieties, the “found rose” list is extensive (see below and feel free to correct/comment)! I may yet follow through with this project, but have put it off for a season.

News reached us in October and November that two amazing North American mail order sources have made the decision to stop shipping. Those of us that have been buying roses for more than a decade or two have seen our choices diminish significantly. Pause and think about how many businesses one could order miniature roses from years ago

This brings me back around to preservation. The Friends of Vintage Roses, now a non-profit organization, has an intriguing model that should perhaps be more widely adopted. Select individuals have been given responsibility to curate collections of unique groups/classes of roses – Brownells, Hybrid Perpetuals, Teas, etc. This effort reminds me of a block of peach trees at the USDA facility where I worked labeled The Museum. It was dedicated to preserving older cultivars not as widely grown commercially at present. Budwood could be obtained by breeders looking to infuse distinctive traits into their programs and/or by collectors interested in heritage cultivars. Perhaps this will stimulate more discussion among the existing rose organizations.

“Boone Hall China” – dr, dbl, found by Ruth Knopf at Boone Hill Plantation in South Carolina

“Buckman China” – mr, dbl, likely ‘Cramoisi Superior’

“Carlsruhe Cemetery Red China” – mr, dbl, fragrant, likely ‘Louis Philippe’

“Charleston Graveyard” – mr, dbl, fragrant, likely ‘Louis Philippe’

“Cloverdale Crimson” – mr, dbl, found in Sonoma County, CA

“Elizabeth’s Red China” – mr, dbl, found at Historic Sacramento Cemetery grave of Elizabeth Stober, similar to ‘Cramoisi Superior’

“Ivy Cemetery Red China” – mr, dbl, found in Virginia

“J. Datson”/“Grandma Frederick’s Red China”/“Frank Veal” – found, Australia, double, not

“Juliette” – mr, dbl, possibly a dwf ‘Chi Han Long Zhu’/‘Pearl in Red Dragon’s Mouth’

“Korbel Canyon Red” – mr, dbl, fragrant, found in

“Lane Red” – mr, dbl, found in Sierra Foothills Cemetery, not ‘Cramoisi Superior’

“Mabelton Crimson China” – mr, dbl, identified as ‘Cramoisi Superior’

“Magnolia Cemetery – mr, dbl, found in Magnolia Cemetery, Houston, TX, suggested name ‘Reine de Lombardy’

“Malespina Red China” – mr, dbl, found in Calaveras Co., collected by Judy Dean, syn “Grenitta Red China”

“Petaluma Crimson China” – mr, dbl, likely ‘Chi Han Long Zhu’/‘White Pearl in Red Dragon’s Mouth’

“Prospect Hill Red China” – mr, dbl, similar to ‘Slater’s Crimson China,’ found in Australia

“Ruth’s Red China” – dr, dbl, fragrant, found by Ruth Knopf in Charleston, SC

“Waterville Red China” – mr, found in Bermuda

Sources

Many of the Chinas can be found at the following American nurseries: Angel Gardens, Antique Rose Emporium, Burlington Nursery, Rogue Valley Roses, Rose Petals Nursery, Roses Unlimited.

Numerous European and Australian rose nurseries offer them.

'Bhavani Nymph' and 'Komachi' are not currently available but may be in the near future.

'Sally Holmes' is available from US, Canadian, South American, European, Russian, and Japanese sources, as well as nurseries in Australia and New Zealand.

Singularly Beautiful Roses

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Please feel free to share this newsletter with friends!

'Sally Holmes'

an exhibit by British rose grower Neil Duncan



'Sally Holmes'

Yes, it gets big!

