

Planted 3 Easy Elegance in flag pole area
Used 5. Shrubs and 5. Shrubs
MAJOR Pruned 5. Shrubs

ROSE Ardor



'Heather Sproul'

normal this year. "an Early Spring" & it was
April 13 For this passionate gardener,
nothing smells as sweet as a rose.

By Eric Johnson

Photos courtesy of Elena Williams

Elena Williams' disposition is about as rosy as the gardens that surround her Eagan home. Librarian, garden clubber, and ardent tiller of the soil, Williams' mother and grandmother introduced her to the rose at age 5 with a summer trip to the Elizabeth Park Gardens in Hartford, Conn. This was the first public rose garden in the United States, and was designed by Theodore Wirth, who went on to design the Lake Harriet Rose Garden. "I just remember these glorious, breathtaking arches of climbing roses," she says. That stunning image sparked a lifelong affair with the flower.

While Williams spends as much time as possible in her gardens in the summer, she'll need to take a break for a few days this year when the American Rose Society's National Convention and Rose Show is held in St. Paul. (See page 35 for information.) A member of the Twin Cities Rose Club, Williams is one of the meeting's organizers. The event is expected to bring more than 300 rose lovers to Minnesota for five days of tours, seminars, and flower displays.

Growing in a Garden

There has always been a garden in Williams' life. "Dad had a few tomatoes. Mom had a few roses," she says.

A favorite high school graduation picture was snapped in front of her mother's 'Blaze' rose in the front yard. When Elena's husband's job took the family to Saudi Arabia, they had a garden. "No matter where or when, I was always growing something," she recalls.

When the family landed in Eagan 20 years ago, their suburban acreage was a blank canvas. Determined to raise little gardeners, the family put in a vegetable plot; Williams' sons got to decide what was planted, including leeks, garlic, and potatoes. "The boys got me to try new things. And now they're both vegetarians!"

The spruce trees the boys planted as tiny seedlings still anchor the corner of the backyard. As the boys reached their teens, Williams started to see signs of the nest emptying. "I saw a transition coming, a time when we wouldn't need all these vegetables," she says.



Williams' mother and grandmother introduced her to the rose at age 5 with a summer trip to the Elizabeth Park Gardens in Hartford, Conn.

Below: Elena Williams with roses 'Morden Snowbeauty', 'Hope for Humanity', and 'George Vancouver'.



Trust a librarian

As a librarian and rose lover, Elena Williams has read many books on the subject. Here are three she recommends.

R is for Rose: Reflections from a Passionate Rose Lover by Carolyn Parker

The English Rose by David Austin

Growing Roses in Cold Climates by Jerry Olson and John Whitman

—E.J.

What could take their place? Williams turned to the flower that first made her fall in love with gardening many years earlier: the rose. And she has never looked back.

A Meticulous Gardener

Williams does nothing halfway. She tends more than 200 rose plants in her yard, a range of hardy and tender varieties—100 of them must be tipped for the winter. She favors the Mini and Mini-Flora because of the great number of varieties and the way their diminutive stature fits well within a smaller space. They also bring variety to the design of the garden and they are especially easy to tip in the fall. (Williams uses oak leaves for winter cover as they are easily worked into the soil in the spring, adding to the soil composition.) Her favorite Mini-Flora is the delicious ‘Butter Cream’, which is medium yellow and full petaled. (Roses are classified by their petal count, which measures the fullness of the flower.)

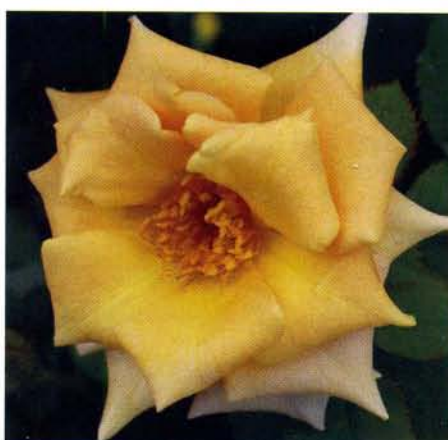
A stroll around Williams’ yard could take hours if one followed the maxim to “stop and smell the roses.” The side deck is a staging area for cheerful, potted varieties, artfully arranged like the

chorus of an opera. An ebullient pink ‘Jens Munk’ hardy shrub rose hugs the back deck, and offers as beautiful a view from inside the house as it does from the neighboring yard.

The main backyard bed is so craftily laid out that it almost appears to be a test garden. Favorite varieties include ‘Heather Sproul’, a tender but disease-resistant perfect pink Mini and the Mini ‘Soroptomist International’, which is a study in perfect form. It starts out as a pink bud and unfolds yellow. ‘Funny Face’ is a pink shrub rose whose colors appear to change as you look at it closely.

Guests arriving at the front door are greeted by ‘Firefighter’ a dark red hybrid tea named in honor of the firefighters who lost their lives on Sept. 11, 2001. Williams’ husband, Mike, is a volunteer firefighter, which prompted her to plant this richly red, sturdy rose. This is what you think of when you think of a rose. The fragrance is unmatched.

Like most gardeners, it isn’t all about the plants with Williams. “I live for the fresh air, the sunshine, the activity,” she says. “It’s a process that speaks to my soul.” However, harvesting the



Williams favors the Mini and Mini-Flora for the way their diminutive stature fits well within a smaller space.

*Top, from left: ‘Buttercream’, ‘Nancy Jean’
Below, from left: ‘Conundrum’, ‘Seroptomist International’, ‘Bee’s Knees’*



6 Great Roses for Northern Gardens



'William Baffin'



'John Davis'

Here are Elena Williams' top picks for cold-climate gardens.

'**Hope for Humanity**' is a readily available Canadian shrub rose hardy to zone 3a. Disease-resistant, it produces unparalleled blood-red sprays of color throughout the season. Introduced in 1995, it was named in honor of the 100th anniversary of the Canadian Red Cross.

Easy Elegance® **Centennial**, a grandiflora. As a rule, yellow roses lean toward the tender side, but this one is reliable. Also a rebloomer, its apricot to soft-yellow blooms gently fade to creamy white. Resistant to blackspot and powdery mildew.

Two members of the Canadian Explorer series (named after famous Canadian explorers) are

excellent climbers. The '**William Baffin**' climbing shrub rose has survived to zone 2b. Resistant to powdery mildew and black spot, its blooms are a cheery pink. Clusters of flowers appear from mid-June to mid-July. '**Quadra**' sports rich, red flowers throughout the season, although most abundantly in early summer. It is also resistant to powdery mildew and black spot. Combined, they make a stunning rose arbor, but Williams reminds us that in such an endeavor, patience is key: "It takes at least three years to do an arbor."

'**Morden Blush**' is a petite (2½ foot), hardy little wonder. Often referred to as a wedding flower, its softly ruffled petals are such a gentle blush of pink, they appear nearly white. Disease resistant and hardy to zone 4a.

Standing proud at 5 feet, the '**John Davis**' Canadian shrub rose is hardy to Zone 3a and is extremely disease resistant. Large clusters of pink blooms give off a strong, spicy fragrance. —E.J.

Climbing roses create a secluded spot in Elena Williams' garden.



'Morden Blush'



Easy Elegance® Centennial



'Hope for Humanity'



What's in a name? A primer of all those rose classifications

The American Rose Society helps define the sometimes confusing classifications of the rose.

Species roses. Often called wild roses, they bloom once and are single-petaled with four to eight petals. (See article on next page for more on species roses.)

Old garden roses. Types that existed prior to 1867, they are the most fragrant. There are numerous classes; some of the most well-known are alba (white roses), damask (intensely fragrant), and tea (the predecessor of the hybrid tea).

Modern roses. The introduction of the first hybrid tea ('La France') marked the birth of the modern tea. Modern roses have several classifications.

Hybrid tea. Perhaps the most popular of the modern roses, they are marked by large,

shapely blooms. These are what most people think of when they think of the roses one gives on Valentine's Day.

Floribunda. Hardier and easier to care for than the hybrid tea, they bloom continuously in clusters or trusses.

Polyantha. Like floribundas, but smaller. Often used for mass plantings and edging.

Grandiflora. A cross between the hybrid tea and the floribunda, it displays the best of both: the stunning architecture of the hybrid tea and the continuous-blooming clusters of the floribunda. It also reaches the height of 6 to 8 feet.

Miniature. Similar to hybrid teas and floribundas, the average plant is 15 to 30 inches.

Mini-Flora. Introduced in 1999, their bloom size and foliage fall between miniatures and floribundas.

Shrub. With a sprawling habit, they can grow up to 15 feet. They are particularly hardy and produce prolific clusters of flowers. David Austen roses fall into this class, resembling old garden roses, but with recurring blooms and greater fragrance.

Large-flowered climber. Commonly referred to as climbing roses, they have long, arching canes that will climb if tied to a structure. A variety of flower forms, shapes, and colors.

The 2007 Handbook for Selecting Roses published by the American Rose Society is a great resource for the fledgling and experienced rosarian. The handbook is a benefit of membership to the society.

Visit www.ars.org for more information.


—E.J.

individual year will dictate how great of a problem it will be. To aid in the battle, Williams sprays her roses in April with Wilt-pruf, a non-toxic product made from pine trees. It also effectively protects against wind damage.

Williams battles the humidity-loving black-spot fungus with a dose of fungicide sprayed on the bloom (according to directions) just before color appears in the bud. It also helps to avoid watering a couple of hours before sunset. But don't rule out watering the foliage, a practice long forbidden by gardeners. Hosing down the foliage on a 100 F July day effectively cools down the plant. A strong spray also knocks off aphids.

Mulch ado. Water, fertilize, then mulch on June 1 when the soil warms up. Mulch keeps water in and keeps black spot spores from splashing up on the plant. Williams especially enjoys cocoa-bean mulch; dogs leave it alone, it looks lovely, and it decomposes and adds nutrients to the soil.

Williams has another hint that has served her well through the years: connect with others. From her mother and grandmother introducing her to her first 'American Beauty,' to her husband trenching right along side her, family has always been part of her gardening efforts. Her current garden club cohorts rank among her best friends. She is a member of the Eagan Garden Club and president of the Twin Cities Rose Club. "Most importantly, we are educational organizations, but there is a wonderful social component as well that I love," she says.

A definition of a hobby is "favorite occupation." Williams has found it. She discovered this favorite occupation by paying close attention to what life presented her. Whether it's roses or rutabagas, true gardeners have a calling that is not quickly answered. Growing roses is not easy, but like anything worthwhile, the required devotion pays off. In this case, the payoff is thousands of blooms of the world's most famous and best-loved flower and relationships that last a lifetime. 

Eric Johnson is a Minneapolis-based writer and a garden, graphic, and Web designer.

Consider Visiting: Roses on the River Front

The American Rose Society's 2007 National Convention & Rose Show, hosted by the Twin Cities Rose Club, June 28 to July 2.

The event will feature seminars, garden tours, and a stunning rose show. The rose show opens to the public Saturday, June 30, from 1:30 to 9 p.m. and on Sunday, July 1, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information, see www.twincitiesrose.org —E.J.

