

In The Garden: They promised us a rose garden

June 29, 2018

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The word came down — rip them out, rip them all out, every last one of them. There's no time for nostalgia in a garden. When plants perform poorly when ravaged by insects and diseases, they have to go.

That may be, but I can't simply dig out my few old roses just because they're sometimes a little moth eaten — the appearance, not the cause. It's more likely to be caterpillars or aphids that ravage them. And then there are the occasional bouts of black spot that I do my best to deal with. It's a struggle sometimes to keep them looking healthy, and they do look a little miserable at times, but I've had them so long they're like old friends I'd hate to lose.

Not so at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington. Despite the best efforts of RBG's horticulture team, in recent years the roses in the Centennial Rose Garden were suffering from the same problems as mine. Like my tiny rose garden, and rose gardens everywhere, the ones at the RBG featured the same hybrid teas and floribundas that after 50 years had become more prone to damage from insects and disease.

I can live with my few roses, but the RBG is the largest botanical garden in Canada and a National Historic Site, where of course, appearance is everything. The roses had to go and go they did, the complete rose garden — including the soil. Eighteen inches of the tired old stuff containing the residue of years of pesticides and fungicides was removed.

According to Alex Henderson, curator of plants at the RBG: "The idea with this garden was to create an organically rich soil that promotes plant health and deep rooting of the roses. It's akin to a forest floor that receives organic soil renewal with annual leaf fall and no inorganic chemicals."

With two acres of soil replaced and a trickle irrigation system installed, work began on upgrading the pathways to make them fully accessible. Gazebos and obelisks went in and an array of new informative signs were installed to tell the story of roses.

Then it was time for the new roses to be planted, 3,300 gorgeous, hardy, and disease resistant ones, 300 cultivated varieties in all. After being delayed by a week because of the ice storm, planting took place in late April and mid May of this year.

And now, in June, the roses are blooming magnificently, even though they're still in the initial stages of growth. Interplanted among them are a further 45,000 companion plants selected to repel pests and attract beneficial insects.

Of the roses, one in particular is prominently displayed and deservedly so. Canadian Shield with its red, fragrant blooms and lush green leaves is the first in a series called the 49th Parallel from Canada's National Hardy Rose Program. The program was established in 2010 at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre in Lincoln, Ont., in partnership with the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association (CNLA).

The roses bred by the centre are selected to be disease resistant and hardy enough to handle winter almost anywhere in the country. The next in the series will be Chinook Sunrise, available in 2019. It's a rich, coral coloured one and there'll be more to follow.

This represents a modern, environmentally conscious approach to growing roses and one that can be adopted in any garden. It's also the ecologically sound approach of the RBG that began with the rejuvenated rock garden that reopened in 2016. Either of those two areas are alone well worth the short drive, but there's much more to see, and a day spent at the Royal Botanical Gardens is always a delight. Plan your day at www.rbq.ca.

I may not be ready to renovate my own rose garden just yet, but I have managed to squeeze in a Canadian Shield down here at the 43rd parallel. You can see it and the RBG rose garden here: [flic.kr/s/aHskykXv6X](https://www.flickr.com/photos/aHskykXv6X/).

<https://www.therecord.com/living-story/8698844-in-the-garden-they-promised-us-a-rose-garden/>