

A Peek Inside My Rose Grooming Kit

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Oh, how I wish that roses came off the bush ready to win Queen. But, that rarely happens. We need to primp and groom them, much like Miss America. So, what do exhibitors do to make their blooms the best they can be? They have a grooming kit chock full of handy tools. And therein lies the secret to winning a trophy.

THE KIT

First, find a lightweight container to hold all the necessities. A plastic fishing tackle box is perfect. Not only is it lightweight, but plastic will not rust. It should have a handle and a few drawers. The kind I like the best is open on the top so that we can have easy access to our grooming tools. Plus, we have a drawer on the bottom for keeping a backup supply of entry tags, extra Q-tips, rubber bands, etc. I have also seen exhibitors use all types of containers for their grooming kits: plastic bags, canvas bags, shoeboxes, you name it, whatever works for you.

SCISSORS

For trimming off damaged foliage or petals. You will need a pair of straight-edge scissors, and a small pair of cuticle scissors for getting into tiny spaces. But the ultimate in exhibitor's scissors is the deckle-edge scissors which are great for trimming damaged foliage. It leaves a random edge on the foliage, so the judges will hardly notice that you have trimmed it.

SABLE BRUSHES

For coaxing blooms into perfect spirals. I keep several types and sizes in my grooming box. The big make-up application brushes come in handy for brushing the backsides of petals, which will encourage tight petals to roll downward and therefore appear more open than they really are.

TWEEZERS

For single-petalled roses, tweezers are useful in removing the tiny petaloids which may be distracting. Tweezers are also useful for removing unsightly guard petals.

EXACTO KNIFE

For trimming unwanted side growth. Sometimes you need to get in real close to remove some of the side growth.

ENTRY TAGS

Try to get some in advance, but most societies should furnish some at their shows. For local shows, you usually do not need to fill in the bottom portion of the tag, only the top portion. But, read the show schedule because you never know what each show will require. Put your name and address on the entry tags the night before each show. This is a tremendous time saver. You could also attach the rubber bands to the entry tags ahead of time.

RUBBER BANDS

For attaching the entry tags to the vase of your rose specimen. Many shows will furnish rubber bands, but I have been to some shows, including one district convention where the show committee forgot to supply rubber bands. So come prepared.

LABELS & RUBBER STAMP

Get the sticky ones so you can quickly press them onto the entry tags. You could also just write your name and address on the entry tags, but that would be too time-consuming. A rubber stamp is even better.

BALLPOINT PEN

For writing the names of roses on the entry tags. Use blue or black only, and do not use felt tips or rollerballs because the ink will smear if the tags get wet. Never use green, red, or other distracting colors of ink.

SHOW SCHEDULE

Always get one in advance for each show. The night before a show, I like to take a colored marker and highlight the classes which I plan to enter.

STEM STRIPPER

For stripping off thorns when a big stem won't fit into a vase. You won't need to use this tool on many of your roses, but some roses, such as Pristine, have such humongous thorns that it would be otherwise difficult to push the stem into the vase without first removing the thorns.

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WEDGING MATERIAL

Actually, there are two types of wedges. One type of wedge is used for wedging open the blooms, e.g. Q-tips. The other type of wedge is used for propping up the stem of a rose. Wedges can help make a rose stem stand up straight in the vase. The ultimate wedging material, which has become very popular, is green styrofoam. It works great and distracts very little from the bloom. You can use aluminum foil, plastic wrap, rose stems, or whatever is allowed in the show schedule. Aluminum foil can be distracting and plastic wrap can sometimes restrict the rose from getting a water supply.

Q-TIPS

These are great for helping to prop open tight blooms. Also useful for cleaning spots off the blooms. Keep a ziplock bag full of Q-tips in your grooming kit.

COTTON BALLS

Another type of prop or wedge to help open tight blooms. Simply push them in between the petals of a tight bloom and leave them there for awhile. Be sure to remove them before entering your rose in the show.

CLEANING CLOTHS

A dishtowel is perfect for this. Great for wiping foliage and cleaning up spills. We also like to bring along old pieces of terrycloth towel, and a dishcloth. Dry Bounty paper towels are excellent for cleaning foliage.

REFERENCE BOOKS

Bring a copy of the ARS Handbook for Selecting Roses. If you can afford it, also bring the Combined Rose List. These books are helpful in making sure that you are entering your roses under the official exhibition names. Also, in the pressure of exhibiting it's helpful to look up the correct spelling of some roses, or the introduction date of old garden roses.

YOUR LIST OF ROSES

Make a list of all your roses. I keep mine on my computer and update the list from time to time. Then I bring my rose list to every show, with the roses marked which I have brought. It helps to stay organized. This also helps me to plan in advance which roses I will enter into which class.

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