

My Favorite Floribundas

By Robert B. Martin, Jr.

Rose gardeners interested in the recent trend toward increased use of shrubs and similar roses in the landscape should not overlook the floribunda. A floribunda is so named because it typically produces abundant blooms in sprays. For this reason, in England the floribunda and grandiflora are included in one class called "cluster flowered" roses. But floribundas also sometimes produce individual blooms in the manner of a hybrid tea, often with hybrid tea form but smaller in size than a typical hybrid tea. In either case, the size of the plant is generally compact, which makes the floribunda an excellent landscape shrub that can be used with other plantings or massed for display.

The selection of roses to grow is usually a very personal decision and this is quite so with floribunda. As an exhibitor, I like floribundas that can show. I also like a garden display of blooms so I am partial to floribundas that produce sprays of colorful and very showy blooms. With these likes in mind I present a dozen of my favorite floribundas.

Charlotte Anne, mauve, Blankenship, 1993. ARS rating 8.2. Found by Paul Blankenship this is a lavender sport of 'Playgirl' (see below) with all the same good qualities; it can produce massive sprays of single (5 petals) blooms that show very well. The bush can be quite vigorous and makes a beautiful garden display.

'Fabulous!', white, Zary, 2000 New. What are the best two floribundas of all time? Ask a serious rosarian and it is likely they will name 'Iceberg' and 'Sexy Remy'.

So what happens when you cross 'Iceberg' by 'Sexy Remy'? The result for Keith Zary was 'Fabulous!', a Gold Medal winner at Lyon France in 1997 and the Jackson & Perkins 2001 Floribunda of the Year. 'Fabulous!' is a robust, bushy, upright floribunda of medium height (3 1/2 feet) which produces pure white 3 1/2-inch blooms of camellia form with 25-30 petals. The blooms are borne in large clusters that display well against dark green, glossy, disease-resistant foliage. The fragrance is slight. Although as yet unrated by the ARS, reporters in the 2002 Pacific Southwest District "Roses in Review" Survey gave it the top exhibition rating among floribundas of 8.1, and one of the highest garden ratings, also 8.1. Sam McGredy when asked to name the ten most influential roses of the 20th Century included his own 'Sexy Remy', commenting that it "lives up to its name - its children dominate the rose breeding scene." And now perhaps we have the greatest of those children, the well-named 'Fabulous!' which simply is.

French Lace, white, 1981. ARS rating 8.1. Winner of the 1982 AARS award and the Portland Gold Medal in 1984, this is an outstanding one bloom to a stem floribunda and is special through each stage of bloom. The bud is creamy white tinged with pink, which opens to a perfect high centered hybrid tea form bloom. Fully opened, the bloom takes on a white frilly appearance from which it derives its name. There is a lovely fragrance. The bush tends to be short and there is a problem with vigor, although I have heard of and seen examples that have no such problem.

'Geisha', medium pink, M. Tantau, 1964. ARS rating 7.0. Forget the ARS rating; sometimes you have to go with your heart. I fell in love with this rose in the Arizona garden of Dona English. And then I fell in love with her. 'Geisha' is Dona's favorite floribunda so I will go with her description: "This cluster-flowered floribunda is medium pink, semi-double and has a mild fragrance. It repeats well even in our heat once it becomes established. It is resistant to rust and powdery mildew. The growth of the two bushes here was modest at first, but picks up in the third year. The healthy, medium green foliage is in good proportion to the 3-4" blooms. They are also quick to repeat bloom. Part of the uniqueness of this variety is the abundance of wide, heavy amber stamens touched with maroon. The warmth of the stamens contrasts well with the cool, silvery pink of the petals. The blooms come singly as well as in clusters of three to seven. They last well both on the bush and in the vase. One needs only a bit of extra care and patience to let this beautiful floribunda become established and will then be richly rewarded." Amen.

'Iceberg', white. R. Kordes, 1958. ARS rated 8.8. Named a World's Favorite Rose in 1983, 'Iceberg' is on the short list of most rosarians as one of the world's best roses. The bush features spray after spray of pure white, semi-double blooms that can give the bush the appearance of its name – an iceberg. The bush is vigorous, disease resistant, and seems to thrive everywhere. I particularly like it as a tree rose because in bloom it presents a pom-pom effect that is quite striking.

Lavaglut, dark red, W. Kordes, 1978. ARS rating 8.7. Although introduced in Germany in 1978, 'Lavaglut' has only recently become widely available in the U.S. through Weeks roses. The name in German means "lava glow". It makes a short, compact bush that knocks itself out by producing massive sprays of small ruffled blooms of the deepest red.

'Nicole', white, Kordes, 1985. ARS rating 8.9. Not a white, but instead a white with a cream center and vibrant deep raspberry pink edges in a picotee effect. The bush is especially vigorous and it grows as a climber in our warm climate. It produces masses of semi-double blooms and will reward you handsomely if you can find space for it. The rose is also sometimes sold as 'Koricole' and is often confused with 'Tabris', 'Hannah Gordon' and 'Raspberry Ice', all of which are very similar.

'Pasadena Star', white, Martin, 2001. New. This is my introduction from a cross of 'Anne Morrow Lindbergh' x 'Glowing Amber'. It has a long elegant white bud edged in pink which opens to stunning, exhibition form, high-centered blooms of ivory with a light pink edging

and yellow at the base. The blooms quill in the form of a star and typically have about 28-32 petals. The yellow at the base is more prominent in cooler, overcast weather and shaded conditions. The blooms appear individually, and more so in clusters as the bush matures. The bush itself is upright, of medium height, with medium green, semi-glossy foliage. When immature, the foliage tends to attract mildew, however the foliage becomes more leathery at maturity and is more disease resistant. It grows well budded and on its own roots.

'Playboy', red blend, Cocker, 1976. ARS rating 8.4. Single. Hybridized by Cocker and introduced in 1976 this rose is a knockout. The single (5 petals) blooms are a wild mixture of orange and red with the emphasis on the orange. The blooms come in large sprays which show and display very well. The bush is very vigorous with glossy disease resistant foliage. I am told it may fade in the hot Arizona sun; in Pasadena I noted that it benefited from a little shade.

'Playgirl', medium pink, Moore, 1986. ARS rating 8.3. Hybridized by Ralph Moore this rose is appropriately an offspring of 'Playboy'. The form and growth habit are similar but the color of the single (5 petals) blooms is a rich deep pink. It is a suitable garden companion to 'Playboy', however should be given its own space as the colors of the two clash. It has a tendency to sport, producing two identical lavender sports, 'Charlotte Anne' (above) and Kitty Belendez's 'Puanani'; and two identical 'Dainty Bess' light pink sports, 'Miss Ada' and Lynn Snetsinger's 'Sweet Serenity'. All are very good garden roses.

'Sexy Remy', medium pink, McGredy, 1984. ARS rating 8.7. Winner of six prestigious Gold Medals, 'Sexy Remy' is also the leading winner of the best floribunda spray category in U. S. rose shows over the last five years. It has clear dainty pink blooms with a frilly effect that appear in large, abundant sprays. The blooms are long lasting both on the bush and as a cut flower. The bush is compact and of medium height. Years ago, I experimented with putting it with 'Playboy' and 'Playgirl' to provide a racy corner in the garden but its sweet pink color simply does not fit with the hot colors of those two.

'Showbiz', medium red, M. Tantau, 1983. ARS rating 8.4. Those who may wonder why I fail to include on my list the outstanding floribunda 'Europeana' will find the answer here. A winner of AARS designation in 1985, 'Showbiz' is similar in habit and more of an orangish or lipstick red than 'Europeana'. Both are compact, even short bushes, which throw off heavy sprays of semi-double blooms that often require staking to keep them off the ground. I think 'Showbiz' is more productive or at least that's what I was thinking when I chose it over 'Europeana'. It may be sensible to get them both.

Although many floribundas are being introduced as shrubs these days, there are a number of very promising new floribundas on the horizon that are getting good reviews and may make my list in the future. They include the strangely colored 2002 AARS winner 'Hot Cocoa'; Sam McGredy's last introduction, the gold 'Top Notch'; the sport of 'Iceberg', 'Brilliant Pink Iceberg' and the 2004 AARS winner 'Day Breaker' from Edmunds. So maybe it's a good idea to try something old and something new. With the floribunda, its hard to go wrong.