

# climbing and rambling Roses

Here are 10 beguiling climbing and rambling roses ideal for creating romantic vignettes in your garden. BY JEFF COX

**C**LIMBING AND rambling roses are wondrously useful in the garden, tumbling from trees or adorning pillars and posts, arbors, and archways with beautiful and often lusciously fragrant flowers.

The 10 climbing and rambling roses profiled here are the cream of the crop, based on my own experience as well as recommendations from expert rose growers around the country. Most are hardy and disease resistant, and all have a basket full of good qualities that makes them stars in the garden. Several other climbers worthy of consideration, including some very recent introductions, are listed in the chart on page 21.

The terms “climber” and “rambler” are sometimes used interchangeably, but most climbers rebloom to some degree over the growing season and grow to a height of about eight to 15 feet on sturdy stems. Rambling roses, on the other hand, tend to bloom once in late spring or summer. They can literally cover buildings and their stems are often more flexible than those of climbers. In his book, *Climbing Roses of the World* (see “Resources,” page 20), rose expert Charles Quest-Ritson says “ramblers have a greater admixture of wild roses in their more immediate ancestry...whereas climbing roses are more closely related to such complex hybrids as the Hybrid Teas and Floribundas.”

Not all roses suited for climbing are billed as such. For example, some English or modern shrub roses, such as Golden Celebration, discussed on page 19, can be trained as climbers. And, according to Steve Jones, vice president of the American Rose Society, hybrid musk roses make good climbers in hot, sunny regions where they tend to put on extra height.



**'Adélaïde d'Orléans'**

**'ADÉLAÏDE D'ORLÉANS'**  
(USDA Hardiness Zones 5–10, AHS Heat Zones 10–5)

Antoine Jacques, a French horticulturist who worked for the Duc d'Orléans in the early 19th century, bred this graciously proportioned rambler from *Rosa sempervirens* stock in 1826. Its lax form allows for a cascade of exquisite flowers blooming along leafy canes that hang down

gracefully from trees, arches, pergolas, trellises, and walls. The roses themselves begin as small, rosy-pink buds before opening as soft, pale white, semi-double blossoms, resembling those of crabapples, with pleasingly crinkled petals and a delicate rose scent.

The vigor and health of the parent species make 'Adélaïde d'Orléans' easy to grow, and though it's a once-blooming

rose, that bloom is eagerly anticipated each summer by its aficionados. Unlike many roses, its foliage is nicely shaped and pretty. The grace of form is due to its slender canes, which bear reddish thorns. It's deciduous in the colder parts of its growing region but evergreen in warmer areas.

**'Mlle. Cécile Brunner'** (Climbing)  
(Zones 5–9, 9–1)

The climbing sport of the “sweetheart rose,” as 'Mlle. Cécile Brunner' is also known, is so vigorous it acts like a rambler, scampering to 25 feet up into trees and burying small outbuildings under bushels of tiny, pointed pink buds and puffy little pink, fragrant, and fully-blown double roses. The foliage tends to be sparse along its green, almost thornless stems. Planted in a warm, sunny spot, it will produce two main flushes of bloom in early summer and then flower sporadically into fall.

Climbing 'Mlle. Cécile Brunner' dates back to 1894 and its parentage is murky. Many rosarians classify it as a type of multiflora rose, but English rose breeder Peter Beales places it in the China rose camp. No matter what its heritage, it's an ideal choice for a large spot and has a long-lived nature that will carry it down a generation of gardeners or two.



**'Mlle. Cécile Brunner'**

**'CLIMBING ICEBERG'** (Zones 5–9, 9–5)

Looking up at an arbor at his Garden Valley Ranch in Petaluma, California, Ray Reddell marveled at the masses of pure white roses cascading downward. “It's 'Climbing Iceberg',” he said to me, “and it's a blooming fool.” Reddell, one of the country's top rosarians, wasn't kidding. *Botanica's Roses* calls the shrub form of 'Iceberg' “a unique variety that is head and shoulders above its peers...all in all, it is one of the best roses produced in the 20th century.”

Introduced in 1968, the climbing sport has all of the qualities of the shrub, a floribunda rose, with the added ability to extend its nearly thornless stems to 18 feet, making it perfect for adorning a pillar, post, arbor, archway, trellis, or pergola. Its pure white, semi-double flowers, which appear in large clusters, give a cooling effect in the garden on hot summer days. It blooms prodigiously from late spring to fall. Rain doesn't ruin its blooms, and the plant is sturdy and rea-



**'Climbing Iceberg'**

COURTESY OF DAVID AUSTIN ROSES

TOP: COURTESY OF DAVID AUSTIN ROSES; BOTTOM: MICHAEL S. THOMPSON



'Dublin Bay'

sonably disease resistant except in regions with humid summers.

**'DUBLIN BAY'** (Zone 5–9, 9–5)

Despite what you may read in some rose books, 'Dublin Bay' is not fragrant, but other than that it has no drawbacks to speak of. A cross between 'Altissimo'—a large-flowered modern climber bearing single, deep crimson flowers—and pink-flowered 'Bantry Bay', it was introduced in 1975.

Chief among the good qualities of 'Dublin Bay' is its resistance to black spot and mildew, which means it seldom if ever needs spraying. And adding to those qualities is its determination to bloom again and again over the year. Given enough sun, good soil, and adequate water, it produces flowers singly and in clusters from June to October. My 'Dublin Bay', which I grow in a pot on my deck in northern California, produced the last rose of 2005 in January of 2006, helping me welcome in the new year.

The canes are pliable and easily trained, and the young ones are not very thorny. They grow up to 10 feet in sunny spots, and however you train them, they pro-

duce enough side shoots to display themselves and their flowers to advantage. The foliage is a glossy dark green—just right to set off the bright red roses.

'Dublin Bay' is the best choice for a red-flowered climber, but if you absolutely must have good fragrance in a deep red, double, climbing rose, I suggest trying 'Don Juan' (see chart, page 21).

**'FOURTH OF JULY'** (Zones 5–9, 9–1)

The story behind the birth of the marvelous climber 'Fourth of July' begins with two choice roses: 'Altissimo'—one of the parents of 'Dublin Bay'—and 'Roller Coaster', a miniature with crimson semi-double roses streaked with white and creamy yellow in sunburst patterns. In the 1990s, Tom Carruth, the head hybridizer at Weeks Roses, crossed the two and—kaboom!—the result was 'Fourth of July', a rose so gorgeous that it won the All-America Rose Selection when introduced in 1999—the first such award for a climber in 23 years.

"'Fourth of July', in my opinion, is the best garden rose introduced in the last decade, and it's an eye catcher in every section of the United States," says John



'Fourth of July'

Mattia, an All-America Rose Selections judge. Its very floriferous canes reach 12 to 15 feet, blooming repeatedly during the growing season.

Its sweetly apple-scented roses open in closely-packed clusters of velvety-red bicolor petals, streaked with radiating bursts of white stripes. Each four-and-a-half-inch flower is centered with a clutch of golden stamens that add to the firework effect. The deep green foliage is moderately resistant to fungal diseases.

**'FRANCIS E. LESTER'** (Zones 4–9, 9–4)

Versatility is the great horticultural ad-



'Francis E. Lester'

vantage of this superb climber, introduced in 1946, whose thorny canes grow to 15 to 20 feet. These are ideal for positioning along fences or semi-horizontally on trellising, where sunlight will call forth massive panicles of up to 60 white-brushed-with-pink, single blooms. The individual blossoms are about two inches across, and the panicles resemble big clusters of apple blossoms. A strong musky (some rosarians say fruity) fragrance is another asset.

'Francis E. Lester' is a hardy, disease resistant, vigorous grower. Its only downside is that it is generally a once-blooming rose. But the floral show it puts on in late spring to early summer is worth the wait. The display value is heightened if it's grown up into trees, allowing its pliable shoots to arch and dangle downward in cascades of bloom. Big sprays of large, attractive orange hips adorn the rambling canes right through the winter.

**GOLDEN CELEBRATION**

(Zones 5–9, 9–5)

English rose breeder David Austin introduced Golden Celebration ('Ausgold') in 1993, and in the United Kingdom it is generally treated as a modern shrub rose and



Golden Celebration

grown in mixed borders. But in regions of the United States where summers are warmer and sunlight is stronger than in Britain, it also performs nicely as a climber that can reach 10 feet and is an excellent choice for the smaller garden. The rich golden color of the flowers reaches out for the eye, so it's a perfect choice when looking for a plant to anchor a focal point, par-

**MAINTAINING CLIMBERS AND RAMBLERS IN THE GARDEN**

Climbers tend to have vigorous canes that, when they reach the top of an arch or arbor, want to keep growing straight up—which makes it hard to enjoy the flowers from ground level. Climbing hybrid tea roses are especially set on verticality. If you bend them over and tie them along the horizontal supports atop an arbor, they will grow laterals that will be very floriferous later on.

**Directing Growth.** You can stimulate bloom up the sides of the arbor posts by staggering the height of young canes when pruning. To do this, cut weak, one-year canes back to 18 to 24 inches; a slightly stronger one-year cane to about three feet, and a more vigorous one- or two-year cane to about four feet. Allow vigorous older canes to reach the top and form the horizontal stems. All the canes will put out new floriferous growth from just above ground level to the top of the arbor.

The flexible canes of most ramblers bend over the top of an arbor and hang down, making their blooms more visible from below. Their laterals are also more lax. Because hardly any ramblers are rebloomers, however, you'll have to admire them for their single yearly show. For a longer period of bloom, plant a climbing rose on the opposite side of an arbor from a climber.

Climbing and rambling roses don't climb using tendrils or hooks, so you have to tie them in place. Avoid using wire, because it can cut into the canes as they move with the wind. Instead, use green plastic tying ribbon, twine, or strips of cloth. If you don't want attachments to be visible, place eye hooks here and there at the top of the arbor posts, then hang loops of fishing line that reach varying distances down the posts. As the roses grow, attach them to the loops with the ties.

**General Care.** As with all roses, climbers and ramblers will grow best in a loamy, free-draining soil with a pH that is slightly acidic (6 to 7). Although a couple of the roses profiled will tolerate some shade, all grow best in full sun (at least eight hours a day).

Roses are heavy feeders, so apply a balanced slow release or organic fertilizer containing micronutrients in early spring. Supplement with "teas" made of well-rotted manure, compost, and fish emulsions regularly during the growing season. Apply a layer of organic mulch around roses to conserve soil moisture and suppress weeds.

Reblooming varieties flower on new wood and should be pruned back hard when dormant to stimulate new floriferous growth. Once-blooming roses like ramblers should be pruned immediately after bloom ends so new wood has time to grow and harden over the rest of the growing season. Next year's bloom will appear from this growth, so don't prune a once-bloomer when dormant or you'll remove the buds that will produce flowers.

—J.C.

ticularly because its blooms repeat from early summer into fall.

But that's just the beginning of this rose's charms. Walk up close to this climber and take note of the intricate way in which the flowers are formed. From yellow buds with a reddish blush, fully double flowers open with several rings of petals extending out to create a flat background for an inner circle of small, creased petals that form a cup. When fully open, its roses are among the most beautifully formed of any you'll see. Then bring your nose to a blossom and

enjoy its strong, delicious scent.

Golden Celebration is moderately disease resistant but may show signs of black spot in regions with humid summers.

**'NEW DAWN'** (Zones 5–9, 9–5)

No list of superb climbers would be complete without 'New Dawn'. Introduced in 1903, it has stood the test of time. The World Federation of Rose Societies named it the "World's Favorite Rose" in 1997 and elected it to the World Rose Hall of Fame. All of this with good reason. I planted a specimen by my garden

TOP LEFT: JERRY PAVIA; TOP RIGHT: SAXON HOLT; BOTTOM: COURTESY OF DAVID AUSTIN ROSES

COURTESY OF DAVID AUSTIN ROSES

## Resources

**American Rose Society**, P.O. Box 30,000, Shreveport, LA 71103. (318) 938-5402. [www.ars.org](http://www.ars.org).

**Climbing Roses of the World** by Charles Quest-Ritson, Timber Press, Portland, Oregon, 2003.

**The Encyclopedia of Roses** by Judith C. McKeon, Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, 1995.

**Taylor's Guide to Roses** by Nancy J. Ondra, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Massachusetts, 2001.

## Sources

**The Antique Rose Emporium**, Brenham, TX. (800) 441-0002. [www.antiqueroseemporium.com](http://www.antiqueroseemporium.com). Catalog free.

**David Austin Roses Limited**, Tyler, TX. (903) 526-1800. [www.david-austinroses.com](http://www.david-austinroses.com). Catalog free.

**Heirloom Roses, Inc.**, St. Paul, OR. (503) 538-1576. [www.heirloom-roses.com](http://www.heirloom-roses.com). Catalog free.

**High Country Roses**, Jensen, UT. (800) 552-2082. [www.high-countryroses.com](http://www.high-countryroses.com). Catalog free.

**Hortico Nurseries Inc.**, Waterdown, Ontario, Canada. (905) 689-6984. [www.hortico.com](http://www.hortico.com). Catalog \$3.

**Roses of Yesterday and Today**, Watsonville, CA. (831) 728-1901. [www.rosesofyesterday.com](http://www.rosesofyesterday.com). Catalog \$5.

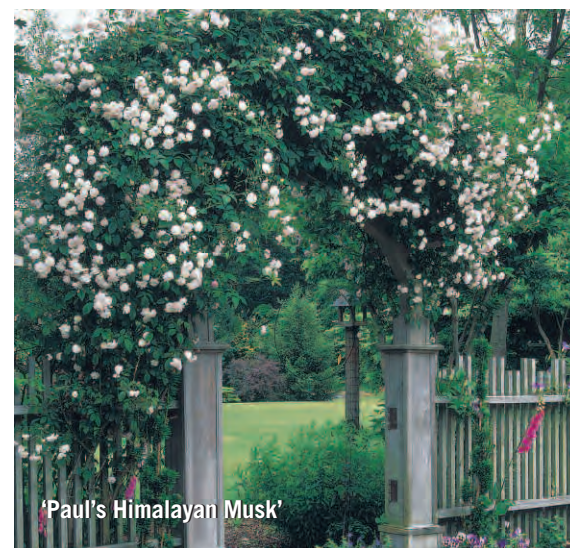
**Wayside Gardens**, Hodges, SC. (800) 213-0379. [www.waysidegardens.com](http://www.waysidegardens.com). Catalog free.



fence and within two years it had filled an area of the fence 20 feet wide and seven feet high.

Some flowers are produced in small clusters and some as single roses atop short stems that grow from pliable canes, allowing the gardener to tie it out at any angle from horizontal to vertical, or even peg it English-style. It repeat blooms profusely and benefits from some thinning and deadheading during the season from June to October. The roses are double, soft shell pink, and lightly fragrant, with a scent some growers describe as sweet and others as slightly fruity.

The foliage is glossy dark green and disease resistant, a real plus in hot, humid



Eastern climates where roses are also known as “black spot on a stick.” Its hardiness makes it exceptionally useful in the northern tier of states but it also performs beautifully in warmer regions.

### ‘PAUL’S HIMALAYAN MUSK’ (Zone 5–9, 9–6)

Introduced in 1916, this is a true rambling rose, but one that’s oddly named because it doesn’t look much like the true Himalayan musk rose (*R. moschata* var. *nepalensis*)—although it’s probably related in some way. Like most rambling roses, it’s a once-bloomer—in July through most of its hardiness zone range, but in June in USDA Zone 9.

This is a rose that will cover a good 40 feet of fence if its 20-foot canes are trained left and right from where it’s planted. If you’re looking for a rose to grow up in a tree so that its long, graceful, floriferous stems tumble downward, ‘Paul’s Himalayan Musk’ is a great candidate. Not only does it produce lax stems that cascade, but its flower clusters droop, shining their faces down upon whomever is looking up at them. The small, slightly musk-scented, double roses are pale silvery lilac-pink.

## MORE CLIMBERS TO COVET

Name (Breeder, year)	Type of rose	Height (feet)	Flowers	Other remarks	USDA Zones, AHS Zones
‘Don Juan’ (Jackson & Perkins, 1958)	Large-flowered climber	8–12	large, deep burgundy red	sweetly fragrant	5–9, 9–1
‘Mme. Alfred Carrière’ (Schwartz, 1879)	Noisette	12–18	large, double creamy white tinged pink	very fragrant tolerates part shade	5–9, 9–5
Polka (‘Meitiosier’) (Meilland, 1991)	Romantica	8–10	dark apricot fading as mature	fragrant and long blooming	5–9, 9–5
‘Sombreuil’ (Robert, 1850)	Climbing tea	9–12	large, creamy white with tinge of pink	strongly fragrant	4–9, 9–3
St. Swithin (‘Auswith’) (David Austin, 1993)	English	6–8	double soft pink full flowers	strong myrrh fragrance	5–9, 9–1
White Eden™ (‘Meiviolinsar’) (Meilland, 2006)	Romantica	10–12	white tinged pink	lightly fragrant	5–9, 9–5
‘William Baffin’ (Svejda, 1983)	Shrub	8–12	double, pink with white markings	very hardy and disease-resistant	3–9, 9–1
‘Zéphirine Drouhin’ (Bizot, 1868)	Bourbon	8–12	rosy pink, fragrant	tolerates part shade, thornless, crimson new leaves	5–9, 9–5



**ROSA BANKSIAE** (Zones 8–10, 10–8)  
Derived from a wild rose discovered in China, the “Lady Banks” rose, as it’s commonly known, has been grown in Western gardens since the late 18th century. Of the three selections of this Rambler in cultivation, the hardiest and most popular is a double-flowered yellow variety (*R. banksiae* var. *lutea*, syn. *R. banksiae* ‘Lutea’).

In warmer regions, this variety is a familiar and welcome sight in mid-spring

when it bursts into golden bloom. The sight can be awe-inspiring, because this vigorous, thornless rose grows to 30 feet or more. It makes a huge mound of bright, pale gold, small, double flowers that literally smother the pretty, five-leaved foliage and slender, arching stems while in bloom.

I have seen it planted along several miles of highway, making the drive seem like tunneling through a happy corridor of

Planted in 2000, the yellow-flowered variety of Lady Banks rose has now colonized 20 feet of a wall at the American Horticultural Society’s River Farm headquarters. “It’s a fabulous rose if you have the space for it,” says AHS Horticulturist Peggy Bowers. “In my experience, it has proven resistant to fungal diseases both in Charleston, South Carolina and here in Virginia.”

golden sunshine. Out of bloom, it’s a massive mound of tall, impenetrable, bushy greenery resistant to diseases. That makes it good for covering banks, slopes, and eyesores, as well as edging property.

Some say that the yellow variety is fragrant, but my specimen has no scent that I can discern. Steve Jones concurs, but says the flowers of the white variety (*R. banksiae* var. *banksiae*) are strongly violet-scented. According to Jones, the world’s largest rose is a white Lady Banks in Tombstone, Arizona, that is “as big as a football field.”

Jeff Cox is the author of several gardening books, including *Landscaping with Roses* (The Taunton Press, 2002). He lives in Kenwood, California.