

GROOMING FOR THE SHOW

By Bob Thorpe, DVM

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Grooming is one of those 8 letter words (spraying) that strikes fear into the hearts of new rosarians. It's really pretty simple — remember, keep it clean and keep it symmetrical — that goes for sprays too. The way we groom actually varies from show to show, depending on how many and what types of blooms we take. A few constants first. To groom, you must grow the right roses. If you take a Mr. Lincoln or Medallion, you can groom all day and probably not have a chance. Know what does well in your area and grow those roses.

We cover EVERY Hybrid Tea bloom on the bush once it shows color. Miniatures are usually not covered because there are so many and we cut them much tighter, while other sprays and types may be covered if feasible. We try not to cut any bloom before Tuesday afternoon, and as a rule, those cut Thursday/Friday are 80% of what we take. Every stem is recut and soaked for at least an hour. Then we place each stem in a vase where the foliage dries some before we start grooming. Every stem is groomed BEFORE it goes into the refrigerator. The day of the show we do not have time to polish and trim foliage; so Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings before the show we spend from 2-6 hours preparing. Sepals and foliage are trimmed, side buds are removed, thrips/aphids are removed as possible, and every leaf is cleaned and polished. Once again, this procedure is followed for EVERY stem cut ahead of time for the show.

Grooming the bloom will vary depending how far ahead the bloom is cut, and how many blooms we are taking. First, we do not pack Hybrid Teas in coolers. We routinely travel by car from 5-15 hours on Fridays to go to National Shows. Miniatures open quicker and we do keep these in coolers until Saturday morning. However, all other canes are transported with foliage in plastic cones and placed in 5 gallon buckets. Once they go into the car, they are not refrigerated. I can only think of three blooms that have blown in 48 hours transporting this way. In fact, they are much easier to work with by being room temperature. When I cut a bloom before Friday, it is usually open about where I want it for the show. After foliage is cleaned, cotton is placed around the outer row of petals to lock them in parallel position. Q-tips or cotton balls may then be placed to balance the 2nd row of petals. The cane is packed in a cone, placed in a bucket with Chrysal water, and goes into the refrigerator. (This also works for minis if you think they may blow). Most of the current Hybrid Tea show roses will lock into this position after a couple of hours in the refrigerator. Some, like Veterans' Honor, Color Magic, Hot Princess and Suffolk will crinkle and must be handled differently.

Thus far, we have about 85% of the grooming done and it has been 100% hard work and 0% skill. Once at the show, the skill factor kicks in. The key now is to remember the outer row of petals must be parallel to the ground and the petals arranged in a concentric manner. Spacing can be enhanced with Q-tips, but petal manipulation is a skill that must be mastered by practice. Fortunately, most roses do the majority of the work for you.

A few years ago I visited a rose show in the Chicago area. Every bloom in the court was photographed and transferred to disc, and that evening I sat with a group of seven prominent rosarians who studied every bloom on screen and discussed how it could have been improved.

This is probably the best way I have seen to learn what a Judge expects. The other thing to do is to practice putting your fingers into a rose. If you go to a National show, go into the show room after everyone is gone, and you will probably find Randy Scott. Randy won the latest McFarland and he is a superb groomer. He will spend hours playing with different varieties on the show table that weren't winners, trying to manipulate the petals to make a prettier bloom — PRACTICE!

A few tips for sprays. First, always have the blooms on a level plane and at the same stage as much as possible.

This will mean removing blooms that are damaged or out of line. Second, for open blooms, if fresh stamens show on every bloom, you will win. Be sure to pull any petals curling over the stamens that will block the view. A damp cotton ball will help keep the stamens fresh; also, let these open inside if possible.

I hope this will help some of you get into those shows. Grooming is mostly preparation the week before the show. If you grow the right roses and work hard, you will win your share. The skill will come. Best of luck.

Bob and his wife, Chris, live in a historic (1830) home in downtown Greeneville, TN. Their garden includes 450 roses of all types. Bob has served as President of the Watauga Valley Rose Society and is founder and President of the Greene County Rose Society. They show all classes of roses and Chris arranges. Between them, they have won 6 National Awards the past three years and both are Bronze Medal recipients.