

THIS PAGE Boxes of rose petals are gathered on dry summer mornings to make into sachets of pot pourri, and fresh or dried rose confetti for weddings.

Celebrated in art and poetry, roses always evoke a powerful emotional response. For Danaë Brook, creator of Country Roses, a flourishing family business in the tranquil Dedham Vale, bordering Suffolk and Essex, their paradoxical character increases their appeal. 'Roses are vigorous and sturdy, able to withstand wind and rain, yet they produce blooms of such delicacy and splendour.' The special selling point of their ravishing range of more than 40 old

# Gather ye rosebuds

The fields at Josselyns Farm on the Essex/Suffolk border are heady with the summer scents of thousands of old fashioned blooms

PHOTOGRAPHS PETER BAISTOW WORDS DIANE BAISTOW

fashioned English roses is fragrance. Fresh cut flowers are available from mid-May to late October, and are much sought after by fashionable florists and designers, and their nostalgic and romantic symbolism makes them perfect for weddings.

Six years ago, journalist and writer Danaë Brook and her husband, art market analyst Robin Duthy, embarked on an experiment to establish old fashioned roses at Josselyns Farm. Robin grew up in the valley, and the elegant French pavilion style house, designed by Raymond Erith and Quinlan Terry, had been built for his parents to take advantage of the views that inspired Constable and Gainsborough.

Childhood gardening with an aunt had awakened Danaë's interest in nature, and when Cants, the local leading rose grower, declared their soil and location perfect, they ploughed, rotavated and manured the soil and planted 500 roses on a small, chemical-free paddock. 'Our soil is an ideal mix of clay and loam,' says Danaë, 'and our microclimate combines an optimum ratio of sunlight and rain.'

When the couple took the first roses to London, they were enthusiastically received by fashionable florists, such as Wild at Heart and Paula Pryke, both for their seductive scents and for their voluptuous form and superb colours. English roses, first bred in the 1970s, combine the charm and fragrance of the old roses with the wide colour range and repeat flowering qualities of modern hybrids. 'These are working roses,' says Danaë, standing ▶



## MAKING A BOUQUET WITH FRAGRANT ROSES

**Pick roses early in the day, cutting a vertical nick into the stems. Plunge in cold water with a pinch of bicarbonate of soda and leave in a cool, dark place until needed.** To create a hand tied bouquet, pick about 20 roses with stems at least 10in (20cm) long, and several long stems of *Alchemilla mollis*. Remove thorns and most of the leaves. Hold a rose in one hand, near the bloom, and begin adding further stems at an angle, while holding the bunch securely but not too tightly, so that you retain a spiral shape. Aim to create a dome, placing different colours together and adding contrasting alchemilla. When it is no longer possible to hold the bunch in one hand, tie at the narrowest point with raffia or string, and trim stems evenly.



### FAVOURITES FOR SCENT

'Gertrude Jekyll' and 'Princess Alexandra' are both vivid pinks. The old Bourbon rose 'Madame Isaac Pereire' has full, deep blooms. 'L D Braithwaite' is the richest red, while 'Charles de Mills' has opulent magenta blooms and 'Big Purple' is huge and sweetly scented. 'English Miss' has delicate, pale pink flowers which are perfect for posies. 'Abraham Darby' has coppery apricot blooms and is the basis for the French perfume Darby-Rose, while 'Just Joey' has lovely heads of creamy apricot.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Warm Wishes is the perfect blend of apricot and pink; the pretty ruffled blooms of 'Compassion'; Gertrude Jekyll a good scented pink; the orangy shades of Fellowship; the richly coloured blooms of 'Mme Isaac Pereire'.



THIS PAGE Writer and  
journalist Danaë Brook  
discovered a talent  
for creating beautiful  
bouquets using  
scented roses.



#### HOW TO MAKE RICH ROSE POT POURRI

Add 1 litre of dried petals to 25gm of dried lavender, and 1 teaspoon of whole cloves. In another bowl, mix 2 teaspoons of cinnamon, 25gm of orris root as a fixative and 5 drops each of rose and lavender oil. Combine the mixtures thoroughly. Place in an airtight container in a dark place for six weeks to mature.

**THIS PAGE** The rose petals are kept in a special temperature controlled dry room for use in pot pourri and confetti.



#### HOW TO MAKE DRIED ROSE PETAL CONFETTI

Gently pull the petals off some richly coloured roses. Spread onto a piece of cotton or linen and place in an airing cupboard until dry and crisp to touch. Store in a sealed jar.

among the rows of a further 6,000 shrubs now planted on the lower, south facing field below the house. 'They have to perform well, and have long stems and good disease resistance.'

To achieve the perfection her customers expect requires a regime of autumn and spring pruning, spraying, feeding, mulching and weeding, supervised by her knowledgeable gardeners. In the season, a team of pickers harvest, prepare and pack the delicate blooms. 'We deliver about 800 fresh roses twice a week to London, plus thousands more for weddings and events,' says Danaë. 'People love the fresh and dried rose petal confetti and our pot pourri sachets and hand tied bouquets are popular gifts.'

Danaë's motivation is 'to give something back to the land,' and to change the balance between her demanding journalistic life and the practical concerns of a country enterprise. 'The life of a writer is so cerebral,' she says. 'I am writing a book called *A Passion for Roses*, but have always needed to get my hands into the earth. Working with roses, literally, makes me feel more grounded.'

It must be gratifying to give such pleasure to people. 'We are offering something special,' agrees Danaë. 'Our roses are sumptuous and sensual, like the finest possible silk or the most exquisite perfume.' Who could resist them?

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#### IDEAS FOR USING SUMMER ROSES

##### ROSE PETAL ICE CUBES

Select some vivid pink or magenta rose petals. Put one in each section of an ice cube tray, top up with water and freeze. These ice cubes look lovely in a summer punch.

##### A REFRESHING BATH FOR A SUMMER EVENING

Add a few drops of rose oil underneath the running tap then scatter rose petals onto the water. The result is soothing and delicious.

##### SCENTED SUMMER ROSE DRINK

To make roseade, a fragrant summer drink, take 6 handfuls of red and pink rose petals with the white ends, which are bitter, pulled off. Bring 1 litre of water to the boil, throw in the petals and boil for just 1 minute. Add 1 tablespoon of runny honey and a squeeze of lemon juice and then put in a cool place. Leave overnight and serve in a pretty glass jug.

