

THERE'S GOLD

in them there roses!

Phillip Robinson

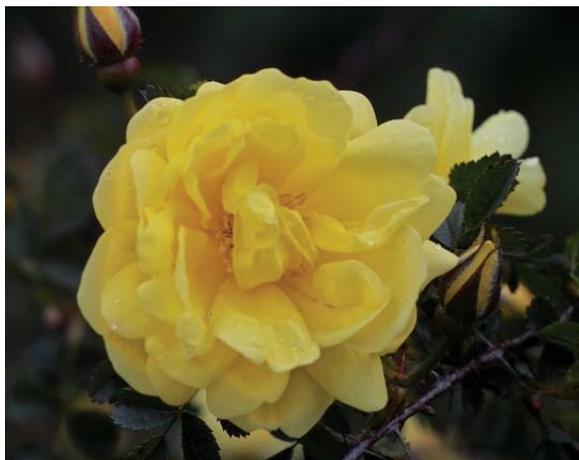


The introduction to Europe in 1824 of the yellow Tea rose from China, PARKS' YELLOW TEA-SCENTED CHINA, was something totally new there, but the rose was probably of ancient origin in its homeland. Its yellow was pale and fleeting, but the only yellow rose at that time in Europe was *Rosa hemisphaerica* 'Multiplex'. Rare in cultivation, it was not only difficult to propagate but had a bad garden reputation for flowers that balled. PARK'S YELLOW had an additional advantage: it was remontant. Hopes were high that darker repeat-flowering progeny that did not fade to nearly white could be obtained. Greater hardiness was another goal, as the Teas and Chinas are rather sensitive to cold winters.

Unfortunately, these goals proved largely unattainable. The true Tea Roses and the Tea-Noisettes were the first introduced. Some had a fairly rich color, but most were pale and/or fleeting in their yellow tones. Attempts were also made to breed the Tea rose yellow into the Hybrid Perpetuals. The results, as in GLOIRE LYONNAISE (Guillot fils, 1884) were slightly creamy whites with perhaps a touch of yellow at the petal bases. Sterility was also a common problem. Such difficulties were eventually overcome, resulting in the early Hybrid Tea roses. The yellowish varieties introduced were much paler or more pink than yellow. Some that were at most cham- ois pink were heavily promoted as yellow.



LEFT: Gloire Lyonnaise. Photo by Étienne Bouret.
TOP RIGHT: *Rosa hemisphaerica* by Redouté.
RIGHT: *R. foetida bicolor*. Photo by Ron Robertson.



A different approach in breeding was obviously needed.

By the end of the 16th century, bright yellow *R. foetida* and its copper red and yellow sport *R. foetida bicolor* were growing in Europe. Although they were long cultivated in the Middle East, their exact area of origin is unclear. They are so nearly sterile that they are not wild roses at all, but probably a natural hybrid that was discovered in the wild. Much later in 1833 the variety *R. foetida persiana*, although probably nearly as old, arrived in Europe. Just as sterile as the other two, it is a double sport of the single yellow. It was the only reliable dark yellow when it was introduced, but only blooms in the late spring or early summer.

In spite of this near sterility, seedlings of *R. foetida*, did appear in the 19th century, mostly hybrids with a form or variety of *R. pimpinellifolia*. Of these, HARISON'S YELLOW and WILLIAMS' DOUBLE YELLOW are still grown. They did not go unnoticed by breeders in spite of their rather formless flowers and little or no remontancy. Some, including Henry Bennett of "Pedigree Hybrid Tea" fame, made enterprising attempts to bring the yellow from Persian Yellow into the mainstream of roses but soon found that there was very little pollen, that seeds were not set in crosses with other roses, and that fertile ovules were absent in its female parts.

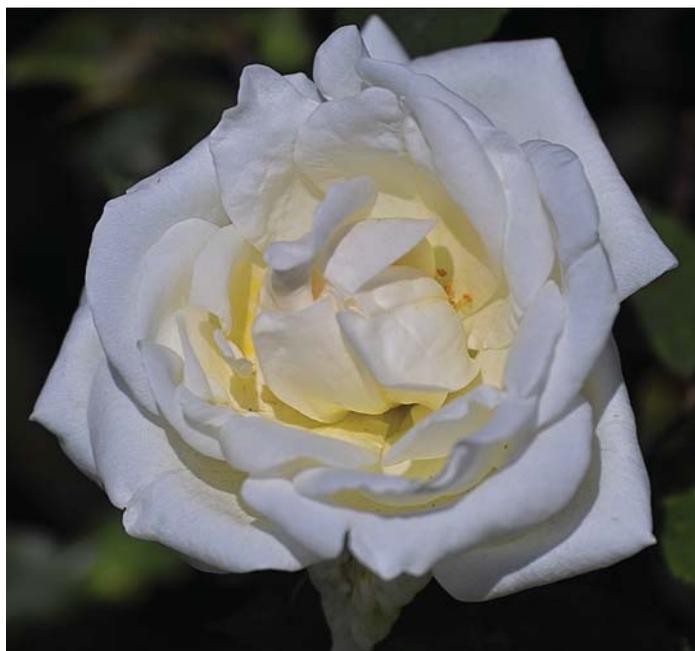
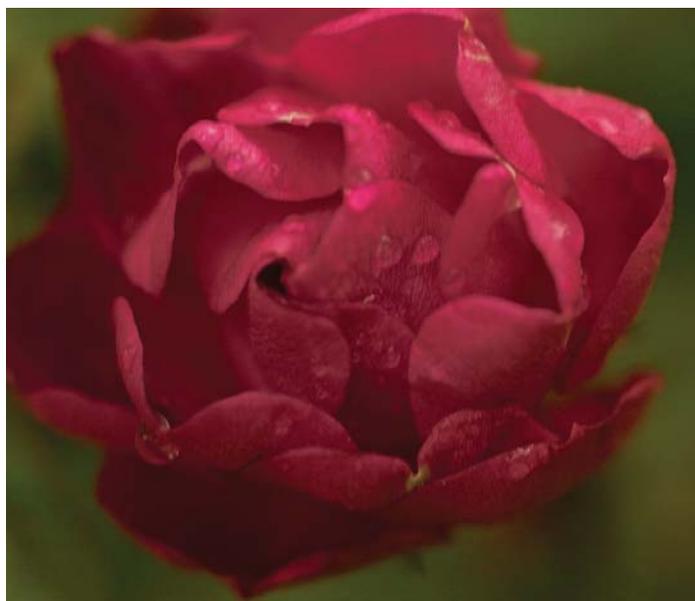
The first to introduce a reliable repeat-flowering descendant of *R. foetida persiana* was Herr Doktor Franz Müller of Weingarten. GOTTFRIED KELLER has



a date on it of 1894, but Brent Dickerson in *The Old Rose Adventurer* says that it may not have been introduced until 1904. If so, that may be why it did not make a big splash or become a major parent of later roses. The color is a blended pink at the base, becoming yellow toward the tips—a somewhat salmon-orange color overall. The form is pointed with long petals, but there are too few of them. The parentage, MME BERARD (Dijon Tea) × *R. foetida persiana*



OPPOSITE TOP: Harison's Yellow. OPPOSITE MIDDLE: Williams' Double Yellow. Photos by Phillip Robinson. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: *R. pimpinellifolia*. Photo by Étienne Bouret. TOP: Gottfried Keller. Photo by Ron Robertson. RIGHT: Mme Berard. Photo by Étienne Bouret.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Mme Norbert Levasseur, Persian Yellow, Mme Ravary. Photos by Ron Robertson.

× (PIERRE NOTTING (HP) × MME BERARD) × *R. foetida persiana*, has me wondering how he was able to cross *R. persiana* in there twice. This rose still exists and I have imported it from Germany. It was rarely used in the development of other roses. The only case I know of is the first true yellow Floribunda, POULSEN'S YELLOW (Svend Poulsen, 1938), a cross of MRS. W. H. CUTBUSH (Polyantha; Levasseur; 1907; sport of MME NORBERT LEVASSEUR) and GOTTFRIED KELLER.

Much more important was the work of Joseph Perret-Ducher, who was active on several fronts in the search for better yellow roses. His first results were crosses between Hybrid Perpetuals and Tea roses. COMTE HENRI RIGNON of 1888 was the first to be introduced, but as with all yellows based on Tea roses the color was quickly lost. He continued to add new yellowish Hybrid Tea roses derived from the Hybrid Perpetual and Tea line up until the strong growing MME RAVARY of 1899 whose color was a pinkish orange-yellow. Al-

though yellowish, it was not the yellow rose he envisioned. At the same time he was also experimenting with crosses involving PERSIAN YELLOW.

The first rose introduced from this line was SOLEIL D'OR in 1900. There followed much confusion concerning exactly how it had been developed. The first



edition of *Modern Roses* from 1930 lists the parentage as PERSIAN YELLOW × ANTOINE DUCHER (HP, Ducher, 1886, violet-red). By the second edition of 1940, the published parents had been reversed, that is, PERSIAN YELLOW was the pollen parent. Both versions of this cross were unlikely, since all offspring from that cross should have been spring blooming only. This was the accepted derivation for many years. It came to light much later in the book *The Makers of Heavenly Roses* by Jack Harkness (Souvenir Press Limited, 1985) that SOLEIL D'OR was actually a second generation seedling that was found under seedlings from the original crosses



ABOVE: Soliel d'Or. Photo by Phillip Robinson. RIGHT: Antoine Ducher. Photo by Étienne Bouret.

growing in the field. Luckily it had not been weeded out for it was remontant, unlike its parent(s).

Things become even more muddled the farther back one goes in the literature. In her article “Some New Roses at Lyons” published in the 1910 annual of the National Rose Society (England), Miss Rose G. Kingsley tells of her visits to rose breeders there, including a visit with Joseph Pernet-Ducher:

That which I treasured most highly was a somewhat loose-petaled flower of yellow-orange and flame-pink. I espied it growing out of the open roof of a little forcing house, and its colour was so vivid and so unusual that I asked what it could possibly be, as I was certain it was a rose that I had never seen before. M. Pernet, with his usual courteous kindness, promptly gathered me a blossom, adding in answer to my eager enquiries [*sic*], that he did not sell it—“it was not sufficiently *rustique* [hardy].” And then came the exciting announcement that this rose was the pollen parent of both SOLEIL D’OR and LYON ROSE, the famous child of the origi-



nal and secret cross between PERSIAN YELLOW and a Hybrid Tea, which resulted in the Pernetiana family.

It would appear at this point that we will probably never know the exact details of the origin of SOLEIL D'Or, the rose that became the major source of strong yellow in the modern rose. But it is clear that the starting point for the line that led to SOLEIL D'Or was that original cross with ANTOINE DUCHER.

Pernet-Ducher had an advantage over other breeders in developing roses from his striking new rose, although others would soon follow. His first was the shrimp pink rose with the reddish center, LYON ROSE, in 1907. It was unusual in the warmth of the pink and red, but it was not yellow. The plants I have seen of this from Peter Beales's nursery in Great Britain are much paler than illustrations and descriptions that I have come across. The most closely related rose that I have been able to find and keep going is SECRETARIS ZWART [van Rossem, 1920 (\times LYON ROSE)]. A short spreading bush, it has charming cream and salmon colored petals edged and splashed with deep carmine. The fragrance is just moderate.

The gold was finally found in 1910 and created a sensation. Whereas SOLEIL D'OR was more the color of an orange (with the fragrance of that fruit) and LYON ROSE was a warm shrimp pink, RAYON D'OR was brilliant yellow with little fading. Both LYON ROSE and RAYON D'OR are listed under more than one parentage. *Modern Roses 11* lists the derivation of LYON ROSE as MME MÉLANIE SOUPERT (Hybrid Tea, Pernet-Ducher, 1905, colored the sort of salmon-yellow found in Tea Roses) crossed to a SOLEIL D'OR seedling. RAYON D'OR is listed with the same female parent but pollinated by SOLEIL D'OR itself. It seems unlikely that he was able to get a rose like RAYON D'OR directly out of SOLEIL D'OR with its strong resemblance to the species parent. It is more probable that Miss Kingsley was slightly mixed up in her memory, and that both LYON ROSE and RAYON D'OR have that seedling growing out of the greenhouse roof as a parent, and that it was derived from SOLEIL D'OR. It seems logical that SOLEIL D'OR was that self-sown seedling found in the field and the plant exploding brilliantly from the roof was a seedling of it. Brent Dickerson seems to have reached a similar opinion in *The Old Rose Adventurer*. From its tenderness one wonders if this seedling's other parent could have been a Tea rose.

The brilliant new color of these roses that came to be called Pernetianas exacted a cost; rather poor form for the show bench, dieback, cold tenderness, a greater susceptibility to blackspot, and a lack of vigor were the major complaints leveled at them. RAYON D'OR was especially susceptible and went out of popularity quickly and is believed extinct. But numerous hybridists were to follow with roses of better growth, hardiness, vigor, new colors, and fragrances. This was just the beginning of the dramatic transformation of the fledgling Hybrid Tea rose class.

In the search for a reliable yellow, many roses were introduced. CONSTANCE (Pernet-Ducher 1915, a seedling of RAYON D'OR) was one of the first. The form was still rather globular, of somewhat fleeting color and thin substance. A perhaps more substantial improvement was GOLDEN EMBLEM (McGredy 1916, parentage not given). This one I have known personally although it is considered extinct by others. It is growing in a planting at the local Junior College in Santa Rosa, California, a planting that had been moved to the location it occupied from other scattered spots on campus in the 1940s. Most of these roses had been replaced over the years, but the current gardener has found a rough map of the original planting. It was not too difficult to select the original plants remaining and identify them. Among them were several very rare roses, but this was the most exciting. So many roses from this period have disappeared completely and none more so than the early Pernetiana yellows.

GOLDEN EMBLEM is an upright bushy plant with rather glossy foliage and clear

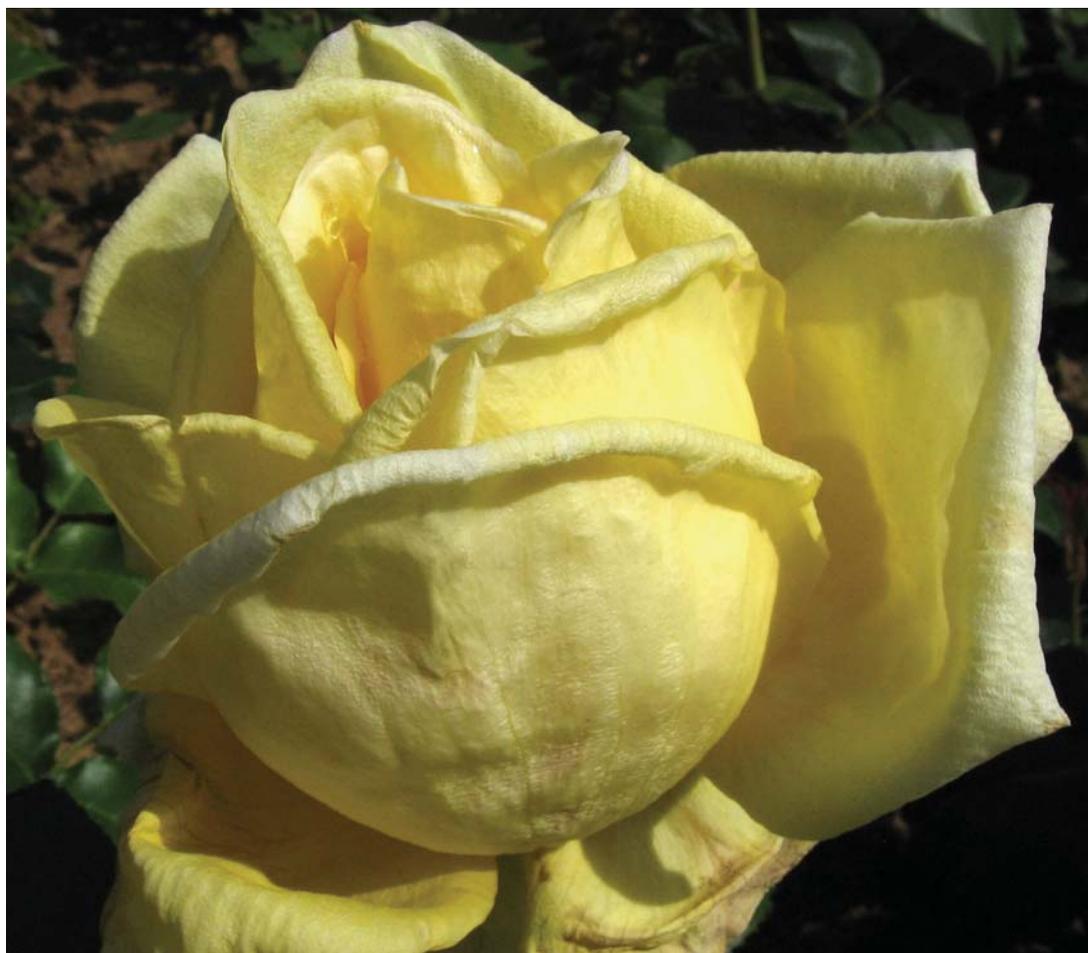


Rayon d'Or from *Journal des Roses*.



yellow nicely formed flowers. It bears a definite resemblance to the younger and better known MRS. PIERRE S. DU PONT (Mallerin 1929 (OPHELIA × RAYON D'OR) × (OPHELIA × CONSTANCE) × SOUVENIR DE CLAUDIUS PERNET). This last named rose was such an improvement in plant character that it became the foundation for much of what was to follow in improved yellows and a major influence on other colors as well.

SOUVENIR DE CLAUDIUS PERNET (Pernet-Ducher 1920, CONSTANCE × seedling) is another that I have personal experience with. I discovered it growing in front of a house that was soon to be torn down for “development” in what was then the semi-rural fringe of southern Santa Rosa. My research made a strong argument for the identity of my findling. A visit to Bagatelle in Paris confirmed this, on observation of plants growing there. In the literature of the time it was praised for its sturdy habit and was also grown as a greenhouse rose for the cut flower industry. A quick perusal of the ancestry of modern roses will show how many roses have this rose in their background.



There was gold in the roses and it took ingenuity coupled with great perseverance to achieve it. What was unexpected was how the range of fragrances and of colors exploded as well. Just one example of the many color changes is the development of non-bluing red roses. The yellow replaces the layer of pigment that caused the purplish tones as the flower aged. To me this is not always a positive result, but others disagree. These are just a few of the wonders of the many roses that resulted from the humble work of a great rosarian, Joseph Pernet-Ducher.

PHILLIP ROBINSON, *a founder and creator of Vintage Gardens Nursery, cares for a collection of nearly 4,000 cultivars of old and rare roses. He gardens with one fox terrier and one rat terrier in the gopher-riddled hills of Sebastopol, California, and has been collecting and studying old roses for more than thirty years.*

OPPOSITE LEFT: Mrs. Pierre S. DuPont. OPPOSITE RIGHT: Golden Ophelia. Photos by Ron Robertson.
ABOVE: Souvenir de Claudius Pernet. Photo by Étienne Bouret.