



## Old American Species and Their Survivors

# NOBLE Savages

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Much has been written about the roses of the Colonial period in the United States, especially the European types that were imported or brought here by settlers. But there is more to the story. This article will deal with our native East Coast species and the hybrids that developed from them, and what survives of these old forms today in the United States and Europe.

The first European visitors to North America were delighted by the rose species that greeted them. John Josselyn's *New England Rarities Discovered* makes special reference to his 1638 encounter with "wild Damask roses, single but very large and sweet." The fragrance of a number of East Coast species is very much like that of the Damask roses. By 1700 enthusiasm for the native roses had sub-

sided among the settlers and the thing was to have roses imported from Europe that reminded them of home.

In Europe the picture was very different. *Rosa virginiana* and its allied species were among the first "new faces" to become available to collectors, and they loved them. A brisk trade in the seeds of American species developed in the 1700s. Plants grown from these seeds were considered living souvenirs from the pristine wilderness—botanical versions of the noble savage. Their fragrance, long season of bloom in the gentler climate, brilliant hips and autumn color were most appreciated.

By 1772 a nurseryman of Rouen in France, one Monsieur Mustel, was listing both single and double *R. virginiana* and the double *carolina*. In 1786, Abercrombie's *The Gardener's Daily Assistant* was selling the "Carolina, the Florida, and the Labrador" to English patrons. In the latter years of the 18th century the Princes on Long Island and the Bartrams in Philadelphia kept up a steady supply of our native types to their European clientele until the advent of everblooming types from China forever changed what we expect from the Queen of Flowers.

*Rosa carolina* is the first native species to consider. Two hundred years ago its synonyms were *humilis*, *parviflora*, and *pennsylvanica*. The typical *carolina* is but two or three feet tall, suckers widely, has non-glossy foliage, and is armed with pairs of prickles just below each leaf (infra-stipular). The rose easily merges with other species, and its intermediate forms are common and confusing. The most celebrated form two hundred years ago was the double one. First documented by Professor Joyaux in 1722 and named *R. pennsylvanica plena* in 1785 by American botanist Humphrey Marshall, it became *R. parviflora plena flore multiplici* in the Empress Josephine's garden at Malmaison where Pierre-Joseph Redouté painted its portrait. This little rose is always listed with reblooming types in catalogues of the period, and was still being sold in the 1840s. Even under stress it always gives scattered bloom in August and October.

Ironically, this once popular plant disappeared entirely from gardens until the early 1950s. Old rose pioneers Doris and Wilson Lynes found *Carolina plena* in a tangle of snowberry and lilac while they were investigating the ruins of an 18th century log cabin near Rome, New York. The Lynes documented their find with careful research and photos in the 1955 *American Rose Annual*,



OPPOSITE: *Rosa caroliniana* from Ellen Willmott's *The Genus Rosa*, watercolor by Alfred Parsons.  
TOP LEFT: *R. caroliniana*. TOP RIGHT: *R. virginiana*.  
RIGHT: *R. palustris*. Photos by Étienne Bouret.