

going native

Jean Lewis



ABOVE: *Rosa banksiae banksiae*. Photo by Ron Robertson. TOP RIGHT: “Irene Pony Express Pioneer”. Photo by Ray Prag. BOTTOM RIGHT: *R. hugonis*. Photo by Barbara Worl.

tion, Ray had started growing tough mountain natives that could survive without care. The grant project was to revegetate steep roadcuts in the Lake Tahoe region of California where the plants were not growing back on their own. Among the first plants Ray grew were roses, including *Rosa woodsii*, which with its good root system, tendency to sucker, and tolerance for both drought and wet conditions, thrived on the roadcuts.

When they started Forestfarm, the Prags only grew plants native to the western United States, something not many nurseries were doing at that time. But eventually they needed to grow more than just natives to make a living and began offering ornamentals suited to the western United States and that do well in difficult conditions. Twenty-five years ago, Forestfarm launched its mail order business with a 10-page catalogue, which now runs to more than 500 pages. The nursery now grows some five or six thousand varieties of plants.

In the early 1990s, Peg and Ray decided to expand Forestfarm’s rose collection and obtained seeds from Russia, Japan, Korea, and arboretums in Europe through a voluntary seed exchange. But today the process for acquiring seed through such exchanges involves royalties or permissions, so they no longer obtain roses this way. However, many of their species roses are still grown from seed.

British Columbia’s Adamsons Heritage Nursery Limited provided the starts for some of their Rugosas, which are among their favorite roses. A number of roses

Nursery owners Ray and Peg Prag decided on their honeymoon that they wanted to do something constructive together away from the city. And thus was born the idea for Forestfarm.

While working with a professor at UC Davis on a grant for the California Department of Transporta-

native to the eastern United States came from various sources. One of Forestfarm’s visiting Hungarian students gave Ray and Peg seed for *R. marschalliana* and “BANSHEE” was obtained from High Country Roses in Colorado. Original cuttings of the “IRENE PONY EXPRESS PIONEER ROSE” came from a rose growing on a friend’s property by the crumbled foundation of a 19th century hotel along the route of the Pony Express stage stop. The rose, like the pioneers, tends to be a bit wild, but they enjoy its mass of small white flowers. Ray welcomes assistance in researching its original identity.

The Prags enjoy and grow a fairly wide variety of other species and old roses. One of Ray’s favorites is the yellow *R. hugonis*, which grew as a hedge by the horticultural building at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Another is *R. foliolosa*, which has fine, fern-like foliage reminiscent of the Chestnut Rose.

Peg, who thinks all roses are wonderful, enjoys “the wonderful Rugosa tribe for their irresistible, fragrant flowers and large hips and they are one of the few roses that deer can resist.” The Prags are also fond of *R. villosa*. Says Peg, “It’s hard for us and the birds to resist the huge bright hips in fall. We have them planted in a bird and wildlife hedge—row combined with viburnum, hawthorn, and other wildlife favorites.

Another favorite is *R. helenae*, named after “Chinese Wilson’s” wife

