**Stratford sub Castle Garden Club 29th November 2018**

**All About Roses Stuart Pocock**

It was good to welcome a local nurseryman, Stuart Pocock of Pocock’s Roses. He arrived with rose bushes to prune, rose perfumed products to sell and formidable knowledge of roses and the rose growing industry. Stuart had begun training as an apprentice at Hillier Nurseries and had been connected with growing roses for his whole career. He grows 50,000 plants at his Romsey nursery, has another nursery in Cornwall, has become involved with having rose oil distilled from the flowers and also breeds new varieties.

He began with a film that showed the sequence of planting the rootstocks, in March/April, grafting a chosen variety onto the rootstock about three months after planting, growing on for a season, pruning the grafted material down to a low bud in the following January and then growing on for the rest of that season. By November of the second year the plant is ready to be lifted for sale. This last process was amazing to see as a machine undercuts the rows of bushes and then they are lifted from the loosened soil by hand. They are now ready for sale, bare-rooted or potted up.

A new opening has been found for all the blooms that appear in the second year of the developing rose bushes. These are collected and the rose oil is distilled and used in ‘Turkish Delight’ and cosmetics. We were able to sample all of the products.

Breeding new varieties is something we all accept though often wonder why so many are produced. The answer is very interesting! Modern varieties are more resistant to disease but the diseases change as they naturally mutate. Roses used for breeding are chosen because they can resist the new forms of the diseases. It is all a game of ‘catch-up’. The moral is that new varieties are good for gardeners! When two roses are chosen for breeding, thought must be given to the product which will have some of the attributes of both parent roses. A new rose must have good colour and fragrance, good health (disease resistance) and possibly be self - deadheading. Roses for our gardens are totally different to those grown for the cut-flower trade. The latter have no perfume but long stems and thick petals to withstand damage during transport.

If you want to plant some roses here is what you need to know. Choose a place where roses, or any members of the Rosacea family (includes many fruit trees) have not been grown previously. The soil can be acid or alkaline but must drain well so that the roots do not drown in winter. Nearly all roses need at least 40% of the day in the sun. When planting a bare-root rose, position the union or graft position just below the surface of the soil. Prune the roots a little if that helps you to spread them well. Use a micorrhisal fungus (trade name ‘Rootgrow’) on the roots and in the planting hole so that it contacts the roots. When planted, remove the top growth down to 2-3” in Feb-March but don’t prune that severely in future. Water well and regularly in the summer. If the rose is potted before you buy it then don’t tease out the roots or disturb the root-ball. If you are replacing old rose bushes then remove all of the old soil and replace it with new before proceeding as before.

Roses need feeding so here is what to do. If you are on clay or loam, feed in March and at the end of June. If your soil is chalk, sand or gravel then feed monthly from March to July. In both cases, use a Rose fertiliser. As well as that, surround the bushes with manure, compost or a mulch. This helps to conserve water, improve the soil texture AND cover up any fungal spores left behind from last year. This prevents re-infection. Don’t use bark chippings as a mulch as they take nutrients from the soil as they rot. (Bark chippings are all right to use round fruit trees.)

When your roses are established this is how to prune them. Between November and February, cut off about two thirds from the height, leaving about one third of the original height. You can use a hedge trimmer to do this! A slightly better approach is to choose a spring-like day, sometime in Feb, do the same but additionally prune weak stems shorter and maybe leave strong stems a bit longer. It is not an exact science!

With climbing roses, remove any weak stems. Next, carefully fix those long, flexible stems on to a trellis or horizontal wires. After the initial slope, tie in the stems horizontally, starting about 60cm above ground. Don’t leave any vertical shoots. The reason behind this scheme is that plants want to grow up towards the light-------- so if you make the stem horizontal, flowering shoots will break out along its length and aim for the sky! If the rose is supported by a pergola then loosely spiral the stems around the posts so that there are some horizontal sections.

Beating diseases is never easy but it helps to water the roots of roses and not the leaves. Warm, wet leaves encourage fungal infections. Most fungicides are preventives so use them before trouble starts.

At the end of the illustrated talk Stuart sold many of his products to members who were pleased to do some Christmas shopping.

Our next meeting, 7.15 for 7.30pm on Thursday, 31st January 2019 in the Reading Room, SP1 3LL, is unmissable if you like laughter in with your gardening hints. Two members, Steve Mayall and Jeff Long are giving an illustrated talk – ‘There are no Gardening Mistakes, only Experiments.’ Do come to enjoy the warm room, lively members and learn a thing or two. The carpark is large, free and right by the door!

**Dorothy Richards**