



La vie en *Rosa*

Frenchman André Eve's life-long fascination with roses has resulted in a remarkable garden, assembled with typical Gallic flair, containing an impressive collection of these appealing and varied flowers

Author: Jacky Hobbs, garden writer and stylist based in London and the Cotswolds
Photography: Clive Nichols

French garden



André Eve in his garden.

Behind an unassuming row of terraced village houses in Pithiviers, north-central France, lies an extraordinary rose garden, the sort that gardeners dream of. It billows with more than 500 different roses, ancient and modern, collected – or created – by octogenarian rose expert and breeder, André Eve.

Devoted to roses

André Eve has roses in his blood. His fascination with them drew him away from his employ (as a nurseryman and landscaper in Paris) the 37 miles (60km) south to Pithiviers, to train as heir apparent to the elderly, long-established French rose breeder, Marcel Robichon. Arriving in 1958, 'wife in one hand, suitcase in the other', André's life developed to revolve around roses, working at the nursery during the day and in his formerly abandoned 18 x 80m (59 x 262ft) walled garden in the evening. He gradually transformed this space to display and study his ever-increasing collection of roses and other plants.

Access to André's garden is via a passageway that leads between terraced houses. Some 50 years after its inception, the garden wears its potential well, filling its girth and healthily straining at the boundaries in high summer, a billowing profusion of roses and other flowers, heady with perfume and vibrant with colour.





New from old

Through his own nursery (sold to Truffaut garden centres in recent years), André soon became well known for rose breeding. He had a particular passion and reputation for older selections, 'Roses Anciennes', fondly referred to as 'Grandmothers' roses'. Over the years he has gathered beautiful and rare examples from around the world, selections of Bourbon, Gallica Moss, Noisette, Damask and Centifolia roses contributing their qualities to André's modern crosses.

The garden features long wooden pergolas built by André to house his many climbing and rambling roses (he championed the re-popularising of rambling roses in France). As a result, roses now spill over the beautiful old garden walls and lace through the towering boundary trees, unchecked. They scramble up the

'...beneath roses are foliage plants, adding... texture and pattern...'

André has planted a green roof thick with sedum and even iris atop his summerhouse (above). In summer it is enlivened with garlands of roses from an unnamed seedling.

trunks of dead trees, stretch lazily over the sedum-planted roof of the summerhouse, shade the enclaves of the glasshouse and peer in the windows of the potting shed, assuming the garden for their own.

André has introduced several of his own climbers: reddish-pink flowered Rosa 'Albert Poyet' (1979); red, white-centred R. Carla Fineschi ('Evepro', 2002); cerise pink R. Rose des Blés ('Evebeau', 2005); and luminous pink R. Roville ('Evero', 2002). In the garden, however, many plants wander un-named – seedlings that failed, for whatever reason, to attain the dizzy heights of commerciality, but pretty enough to merit their occupancy.

Shrub and bush roses add to the rose-flower count. Many are his own creations, bestowed with beauty, perfume and often named after a lady, such as glowing pink Rosa Sylvie Vartan ('Evesylvia', 1969), palest pink R. 'Sophie' (1972), and soft pink R. Miss Lorraine ('Evelora', 2000). These are planted in groups of three to assure generous proportions. They swell in sweeping, curved beds, outlined with snaking grass pathways.



Plant pairings

Amid the roses, André has planted thousands of spring bulbs, crocus and narcissi, followed by tulips. These, in turn, are succeeded by carefully orchestrated plantings of perennials: notably bi-coloured bearded iris such as Iris 'French Can Can', flamboyant in lilac and apricot, combining with similarly-hued *Campanula persicifolia*. Elsewhere, yellow *Iris pseudacorus* 'Roy Davidson' glows brilliant behind giant iridescent orbs of steely-lavender *Allium cristophii*.

Soft blue *Veronica umbrosa* 'Georgia Blue' and violet *Salvia*

nemorosa 'Ostfriesland' complement the varying intensity of pinks and apricots afforded by the rose blooms.

The climbing and rambling roses are not all repeat flowering; many are paired with late-blooming clematis to prolong interest. Silver-rimmed deep purple *Clematis* 'Brunette' along with blue C. 'Lord Nevill' and C. 'Niobe' all extend flower colour into autumn.

Cushioned between and beneath roses are foliage plants, adding colour, texture and pattern; potentially invasive but attractive variegated ground elder (*Aegopodium podagraria* 'Variegatum') and spring

The pastel clouds of roses that smother the boundary walls (above) are under-planted with more roses, here threaded with gentle, pale blue delphiniums and the louder violet of *Salvia nemorosa* 'Ostfriesland'.

flowering *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *characias* 'Burrow Silver', are planted to soften and surprise, while coloured leaf heucheras such as dark purple *Heuchera* 'Binoche', and warm orange *Heuchera* 'Marmalade' add further contrast.

André also grows around 130 selections of *Hosta* with rippled or puckered leaves, including enormous, quilted *Hosta* 'Abiqua Drinking Gourd', blue-hued rippled 'Hadspen Heron' and the ribbed, variegated leaves of 'Sagae' and 'Wide Brim'. These seem to flourish in the shade beneath the rose-strewn pergolas.

French garden



This view of the house is almost hidden by roses and the handsome branches of a *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata'.

André Eve's rose garden

Location: Pithiviers, Loiret, France (37 miles/60km south of Paris).

Size: 18 x 80m (59 x 262ft).

Soil type: slightly chalky, pH7.5.

Summary: rose garden with more than 500 roses, mostly historic cultivars, combined with early summer-flowering perennials and foliage shrubs.

Age of garden: since the early 1960s.

Key season of interest: roses flower from late spring to late summer.

Not open to the public: but visitors can see a garden at his former nursery: Les Roses Anciennes André Eve, 1 Rue André Eve, Z.A. Morailles, Pithiviers-le-Vieil; tel (from UK) 0033 (2) 38 30 01 30; www.roses-anciennes-eve.com

One man's pleasure.

The garden's creation and fulfilment is extraordinary, but so too is its maintenance, passionately tended by André Eve, now in his 80s.

He tends his garden single-handedly and proclaims it 'to be his pleasure'. André is meticulous and methodical, avoiding elaborate plant and soil treatments, and maintains that his plants are like people: 'if they eat well and drink well, they will carry themselves well'. So he personally waits on all of them – feeding, watering, weeding, pruning and mowing – to maintain wellbeing and floriferous euphoria in the garden. ●