



Charleston's Heritage Rose Trail

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In the historic city of Charleston, South Carolina, a new walk of old roses winds around the whole peninsula of residential and commercial streets. Through churchyards and cemeteries, municipal gardens and historic house gardens, beside grand public buildings and across schoolyards, down alleys and along hidden pedestrian passageways that are as old as Charleston itself, this pathway of roses celebrates the old roses that thrive in the Low Country.



ROSES
TOP: Alister Stella Gray.
BOTTOM: Maréchal Niel
RIGHT: "Tutta's Mountain Cabin
Noisette". Photos by Ruth Knopf.

The idea for this rose walk began germinating several years before the 9th International Heritage Rose Conference of 2001. In the 1980s, local citizens started rediscovering the old roses of their city. A few brave souls who loved the Tea, China, and Noisette roses that were so enduring



in Carolina gardens knew these roses belonged back in Charleston. Some had survived in old cemeteries and in the gardens that had not been remade in the 1930s. The first humble Noisettes, CHAMPNEYS' PINK CLUSTER and BLUSH NOISETTE, have a simple eighteenth century charm that seemed appropriate to the elegance of this historic American city. With thoughtful planning, old climbing Noisettes began to embellish the old iron palings in historic churchyards at the Unitarian Church and elsewhere throughout the city. Also, plantings at some of Charleston's

finest historic homes, like the Nathaniel Russell House, were revised to reflect what might have been grown in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The idea soon arose of adorning Charleston with the Noisette roses that had played such a part in the city's history and of establishing a "Noisette Trail" that



LANDSCAPES

LEFT: The Battery section of Charleston

ABOVE: Boone Hall. Photos by Phillip Robinson.



TOP: Bowfront balcony on a classic “Single House.”

ABOVE: One of many charming walkways throughout the Heritage Rose Trail. Photos by Gregg Lowery.

would showcase the rose that had become so well-known and loved around the world. A group of gardeners who were engaged in the planning of the 9th International Heritage Rose Conference of 2001 became determined to link together these good beginnings with an ambitious wander through the roses of the city. They raised money to purchase many hundreds of rose plants and grew cuttings from existing old roses in Charleston and from rose foundlings gathered by collectors like myself from all over the Carolinas. These historic roses came from all over the country, and many were donated by nurseries and old rose collectors.

Now nearly every neighborhood of the city includes a section of the Heritage Rose Trail, from the College of Charleston to the Battery and back up to Anson Street. The rose trail stretches far afield from the old city to include the repository of Noisette roses at Hampton Park and the gardens of Boone Hall Plantation where I had planted one of the first extensive collections of old Southern roses in the area.

Where not long ago old roses clung to life in just a few stray corners, Charleston is now awash in them and their legacy is preserved. Roses like the beautiful creamy yellow “TRADD STREET CLIMBER” are no longer sole survivors but rather multiply their fragrant garlands down many lanes and alleyways. Throughout the city’s historic sites, the Heritage Rose Trail map greets visitors and leads them to the roses.