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Sakura Kusabue-no-Oka Rose Garden

An Asian Collection of Heritage Roses

Dr. Yuki Mikanagi

On the other side of the Pacific, a small but beautiful rose garden is scheduled to open in April 2006. It is a great pleasure for me as a member of its board of trustees to introduce this garden, which has been selected as one of the destinations of the post-convention tours for the WFRS World Rose Convention 2006. But first I must provide a little background and talk about one of Japan's most important rose breeders.

Seizo Suzuki and His Legacy

Seizo Suzuki (1913–2000), Japan's pre-eminent rose breeder, left three major legacies. First, he raised as many as 160 new rose varieties, including SEIKA (OLYMPIC TORCH; Gold Star of the South Pacific, New Zealand, 1972), KAMPAI (CHEERS, Grand Prize at Rome, 1982), and KOSAI (MIKADO, AARS, 1988).

Second, he taught us the pleasure of learning about roses. In his efforts to create original roses, he always strove for an effective breeding program fully based on scientific knowledge. He was particularly interested in the mechanism of biosynthesis of pigments and fragrance in rose flowers. Besides thoroughly investigating the charms of roses through scientific methods, he considered extensive knowledge of the history of roses and rose-related art essential for breeders. His books, which reflect his far-reaching interest in the botanical, historical, and artistic study of roses, have had a strong influence on all rose lovers and breeders in Japan.

Seizo Suzuki's third legacy is the great collection of heritage roses he established at the research institute of Keisei Rose Nursery. The roses in this collection number almost 2,000. Peter Harkness, who saw this collection in 1993, wrote: "For quality of growth and richness of variety I have never seen its like. I could have stayed for days." (*The Rose*, RNRS, Christmas 1993). When Mr. Suzuki re-



Shui Mei Ren (Sleeping Beauty). Photo by Momoko Ajioka.



Tea rose from Laos, showing affinity with Hume's Blush Tea-scented China. Photo by Momoko Ajioka.

tired from the Keisei Rose Nursery, one of his disciples, Katsuhiko Maebara, took over part of the collection.

Katsuhiko Maebara and the Rose Culture Institute

In 1995 Katsuhiko Maebara established the Rose Culture Institute, a non-profit organization with Mr. Suzuki as the head adviser. The Institute's aims are collection and conservation of wild roses and old rose varieties; research and development of techniques in rose cultivation; breeding of new varieties; and collection and publication of rose literature.

In an attempt to achieve these aims, Mr. Maebara opened a small garden featuring Mr. Suzuki's collection in Sakura City, 25 miles east of Tokyo, in May 1996. In the last eight years, the garden, which was named the Rose Garden Alba, gained the steady support of many rose-loving volunteers, and grew more and more beautiful. Every blooming season, it attracted huge numbers of visitors who enjoyed seeing rare heritage roses. With the largest collection of species roses and old varieties in Japan, it became famous as a small but very impressive rose garden and greatly contributed to promoting public knowledge of roses, thus extending the legacy of Mr. Suzuki.



Akamikado (Red Emperor) from Mr. Suzuki's collection. Photo by Momoko Ajioka.



A view of Kusabue-no-Oka Rose Garden.
Photo by Momoko Ajioka.

On January 20, 2000, Mr. Suzuki passed away. The members of the Institute tried to overcome their sorrow by publishing two books in his memory: *Mr. Rose—Seizo Suzuki* and *Living with Roses*.

Rose Garden Alba Finds a New Home

In the meantime, Mr. Maebara began pondering the future of Rose Garden Alba. The garden had little space left for planting more roses, and he was concerned about the ability of the Institute, as a non-profit organization,

to maintain the collection for the future. After discussing these challenges with Institute members, he decided to join hands with Sakura City and move the garden to a larger space in woods owned by the city. The site, near Narita International Airport, is called Sakura Kusabue-no-Oka.

After closing the Rose Garden Alba in June 2004, Institute members and volunteers began preparations for moving the roses to their new home. Mr. Maebara not only played a leading role in designing the new garden and advising the volunteers, but also spent many hours negotiating with city officials over the budget for the garden and persuading members of the municipal assembly to create a rose garden that would embody his and Mr. Suzuki's ideals.

Rose authorities the world over offered their support to Mr. Maebara's project, donating many different varieties of rare roses to the garden—about 800 in all. Let me gratefully acknowledge the kind help of all these people and, in doing so, describe some of the features of the garden:

Heritage roses donated by Mme. Odile Masquelier of Lyon, France Visiting the garden of La Bonne Maison in 1999, we were truly surprised by her collection of rare varieties. The number of roses carefully selected from her collection and donated to Mr. Maebara is now up to 200. They are planted in their own area in the southern section of Kusabue-no-Oka Garden.

Heritage roses from Vintage Gardens, Sebastopol, California, USA We are very grateful to Vintage Gardens for their gift of 50 antique roses. They are a valuable addition to this new garden, which aims to be an extensive collection of roses.

China rose collection from Huaian Rose Garden, Jiangsu Province, China This collection contains 12 perpetual flowering China and Tea roses, all with Chinese

names, like SHUI MEI REN, which means Sleeping Beauty. According to the staff of the Huaian Rose Garden, these roses were raised during the Sung period (12th century AD).

Wild and old roses collected by Professor Yoshihiro Ueda and Mr. Maebara in Xinjiang-Uygur, Sichuan, and Yunnan Provinces, China, and in Laos Among them, an unnamed climbing Tea rose from Yunnan Province with pale yellow flowers is of particular interest. Also, changes in the flower colors of *Rosa chinensis spontanea* attract our attention at the beginning of May.

Summer heat-resistant Hybrid Teas from India, raised by Dr. and Mrs. Viru Viraraghavan These roses hold out the hope that someday we can produce new varieties suitable for Japan's hot and humid summers.

Japanese wild rose collection All kinds of wild species from Japan are represented here. The allée of *R. hirtula* trees (syn. *R. roxburghii hirtula*) lends a unique atmosphere to the garden.

Roses bred by Seizo Suzuki Planted near the entrance of the garden, these roses impress all our visitors with their fragrance and colors, qualities particularly prized by Mr. Suzuki.

Kusabue-no-Oka Rose Garden will open in the municipal woods of Sakura City on April 29, 2006. About 1,800 roses of 800 varieties are planted in an area of 8,500 square meters. The garden is divided into fourteen sections: Seizo Suzuki Garden, Garden of Rose History, Garden of Wild Roses from around the World, Asian Rose Garden, Chinese Rose Garden, Japanese Rose Garden, Old Rose Garden, La Bonne Maison Garden, Redouté Garden, Fragrant Garden, Single Rose Garden, Yellow Garden, White and Pink Garden, and Shade Garden.

Roses Around the World

Osaka—May 11–17, 2006

Sakura awaits you, as does the ancient city of Nara and its historic rose temple, the serene gardens of the old capital of Kyoto, a festival of 7,000 roses in Gifu, and the temples and rose gardens of Osaka. Then, rest your feet while a symphony of voices tells the story of roses in Japan, China, Europe, and the world. Japanese and Chinese botanists reveal the wild roses of Asia. Learn of the rose gardens of East Europe and the hot weather roses of South Africa. Find out where roses are headed in the 21st century, and remember whence they came in a special session, "Roses and Humanity."

To find out more go to:
www.worldrose-osaka2006.jp



Wild rose in Japan, *Rosa sambucina* Koidz (sect. *Synstylae*). Photo by Yuki Mikanagi.

Visitors from abroad, rose lovers and the general public alike, will find these gardens a rewarding and eye-opening experience. While roses from all over the world are planted here, the garden is noteworthy for displaying an oriental taste in the selection of varieties and a uniquely Japanese style of care and techniques in rose growing.

Wild roses like *R. banksiae* and *R. laevigata* start flowering toward the end of April, but the best season for visiting Kusabue-no-Oka Rose Garden, in my view, will normally be the latter half of May. Mr. Suzuki's wife, Mrs. Haruyo Suzuki, has donated her husband's private library and favorite gardening tools, such as his secateurs, to Sakura City, and members of the Rose Culture Institute are considering the best way to make these precious gifts accessible to all the rose lovers of the world.

NOTE: The author is very grateful to Professor Akira Ogawa for his help in preparing this article in English.



Woodcut of Koshinbara, a variety of China rose from Honzo-Zufu by Kan-en Iwasaki (1830).

YUKI MIKANAGI, curator of the herbarium of the Natural History Museum and Institute, Chiba, Japan, received her Ph.D. on the study of flavonoid pigments in petals of the genus *Rosa*. Her recent interests focus on the occurrence of orange pigments in roses. As a member of the board of trustees of the Rose Culture Institute, she takes part in setting up the database of the Kusabue-no-Oka Rose Garden and in its rose identification work. Visiting the natural habitats of all the wild roses in the world is her dream.

*Kusabue literally means grass pipe (a wind instrument)
no means of
Oka means a hill*

Some Japanese can put a piece of a leaf on their lips and by skillfully using their forefingers, play melodies, blowing on the leaf and vibrating it like the reed of a wind instrument. Thus the name Kusabue-no-Oka suggests an idyllic scene where people would like to play the grass pipe.