

RogersRoses

Wild Roses in China

Synopsis of Chinese Wild Roses
Their botanical groups and characters

By Martyn Rix



Rosa chinensis
var *spontanea*



Rosa chinensis var *spontanea* near Pingwu in the mountains of Sichuan southern China
Photograph by Roger Phillips

Roses are very common in western China, growing in village gardens, over hedges, on the margins of forests and on the sides of roads, rivers and cliffs, and forming thickets on open hillsides. Some of the apparent cultivars are obviously planted, others probably wild sown, or other escapes from cultivation. Flowering is generally between April and June.

The innumerable species of wild roses are usually divided into sections; some sections are found only in China, others, such as the dog roses, section *Caninae*, are rare in China, but common in Europe. The following 10 sections cover all the 80 wild Chinese species, according to the account in *Flora of China*.

China contains a particularly diverse selection of species, members of different sections growing together and sometimes forming occasional hybrids. Different members of the same section less often grow mixed together, as they would soon merge if they flowered at the same time. Thus though *Rosa banksiae* and *Rosa cymosa* often grow nearby one another, they flower at different times; *Rosa banksiae* has finished flowering before *Rosa cymosa* begins.

In general the species of section *Cinnamomae* grow at higher altitudes than the others, and *R. moyesii* and *R. macrophylla* are found in coniferous

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forest areas, usually at over 1000ft. The synstylae, such as *Rosa glomerata* grow at slightly lower altitudes, and *Rosa banksiae*, *gigantea*, *roxburghii*, *leavigata* and *bracteata* grow at the lowest altitudes of all, and in the warmest areas. *Rosa berberidifolia* is a desert species, found mainly in the extreme northwest, in Xinjiang, and a different range of species is found in the mountains of the Tien Shan; *Rosa albertii*, *beggeriana*, *fedtschenkoana*, and *laxa* are all species which occur across Central Asia, westwards to Uzbekistan.

1. SECTION **SYNSTYLAE**—Musk Roses Climbers or tall shrubs with large heads of small, white flowers, with a good scent carried on the air. The styles are fused into a narrow column; the seeds are small, thin-walled and quick to germinate.

The common American species in this section is the Prairie rose, *Rosa setigera* and the commonest European species is *Rosa arvensis* Huds; the most important cultivated species is *Rosa moschata*, a probable parent of the damask roses and the hybrid musks. At least 18 species in China including:

<i>Rosa multiflora</i>	stipules deeply and finely divided
<i>Rosa brunonii</i>	usually grown is the tender clone 'La Mortola'
<i>Rosa filipes</i>	usually grown is the clone 'Kiftsgate'
<i>Rosa soulieana</i>	leaves small and glaucous-greyish
<i>Rosa longicuspis</i>	leaves shining dark green
<i>Rosa rubus</i>	leaves large, purplish beneath
<i>Rosa helenae</i>	leaves bright green, velvety beneath; sepals lobed, glandular on the back; early-flowering

Rosa lucidissima
Rosa uniflora
Rosa kwangtungensis
Rosa lichiangensis
Rosa wichuraiana
Rosa maximovicziana
Rosa anemoniflora
Rosa lasiosepala
Rosa henryi
Rosa duplicata Yu & Ku
Rosa weisiensis Yu & Ku



Rosa soulieana in Eccleston Square Garden
Photograph by Roger Phillips

2. SECTION **BANKSIANA**E—Banksiae Rose Climbers with small or very small white flowers, carried in flat heads, with a violet-like scent. Styles very short. Hips very small with thin-walled seeds. 2 species, both found in China. Parent of the yellow-flowered *Rosa banksiae* 'Lutea' and 'Lutescens'

<i>Rosa banksiae</i>	flowers small, early-flowering
<i>Rosa cymosa</i>	flowers very small, late flowering; leaflets long-pointed

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3. SECTION **LAEVIGATAE**—Cherokee Rose An evergreen climber with few shiny leaflets and large white flowers, carried singly, followed by bristly hips. One species in China. Parent of the single pink 'Anemonoides' and of 'Ramona'; also possibly of 'Cooper's Burmese'. This rose is not hardy (zone 6-11), and needs a hot climate to do well.

Rosa laevigata

4. SECTION **BRACTEATAE**—Macartney rose One species, a climber with evergreen, rounded leaflets and large, white flowers produced in succession throughout the summer. Stipules pectinate. Parent of the yellow single 'Mermaid'. Not hardy (zone 8-11), and best in a hot climate.

1 species

Rosa bracteata

5. SECTION **MICROPHYLLAE**—Chestnut Rose A large, slow-growing shrub with peeling bark and pink or purplish flowers carried singly. Leaves with 9-15 leaflets; hips covered with flat, green soft bristles. 2 species in China and Japan. Parent of a few hybrids including 'Triumph de la Guillotière'.

Rosa roxburghii f. *normalis*



Rosa roxburghii f. *normalis* in the wild in Sichuan south west China
Photograph by Roger Phillips

6. SECTION **INDICAE**—Tea and China roses Tall climbers with white, pink or red flowers carried singly. Leaflets smooth. Hips large, with thick-walled seeds. Parents 'Semperflorens', 'Old Blush' ('Semperflorens' x *Rosa gigantea*) and of teas and hybrid teas; 2 species in China

Rosa chinensis

var *spontanea* flowers medium-sized, usually pink, turning red, sometimes creamy or white

Rosa gigantea flowers large, white, pale pink or pale yellow

7. SECTION **CINNAMOMAE**—Rugosa and moyesii roses Shrubs with arching branches, and pink or reddish flowers in small heads, usually followed by large, flask-shaped hips. Seeds with rather thick skins. Around 30 species in China, many difficult to tell apart; the key below attempts to distinguish some of the species. *Rosa rugosa* itself is confined to Japan, and NE China, where it is found along the coast. *Rosa fedtschenkoana* is now thought to be an ancestor of the damasks.

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Rosa moyesii sepals hairy inside; flowers often deep red
Rosa macrophylla flowers and fruit large
Rosa multibracteata flowers small, with numerous wide bracts
Rosa willmottiae flowers small, without wide bracts
Rosa rugosa leaflets coarse; flowers bright pinkish-red
Rosa davidii pink or whitish flowers in branched heads; hips large.

Rosa prattii
Rosa willmottiae
Rosa setipoda
Rosa corymbulosa
Rosa caudata
Rosa banksiopsis
Rosa oxyacantha
Rosa saturata
Rosa bella
Rosa chengkouensis
Rosa sweginzowii
Rosa persetosia
Rosa murielae
Rosa forrestiana
Rosa calyptropoda Card.
Rosa pseudobanksia
Rosa giraldii
Rosa sertata
Rosa webbiana
Rosa davurica
Rosa tibetica
Rosa acicularis
Rosa albertii
Rosa beggeriana
Rosa fedtschenkoana
Rosa laxa Retz



Rosa webbiana

8. SECTION **PIMPINELLIFOLIAE**
(inc. section Luteae)—Scotch and yellow roses. Small, usually suckering plants with rounded leaflets and small yellowish or whitish flowers. In China mainly in the dry NW. This section includes *Rosa foetida*, which brought the bright yellow colour into hybrid teas.

Rosa xanthina
Rosa kokanica
Rosa primula
Rosa hugonis
Rosa platyacantha
Rosa pimpinellifolia
Rosa farreri
Rosa koreana
Rosa graciliflora



Rosa foetida. Photograph by Martyn Rix

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Rosa omeiensis forma *pteracantha*. Photographed by Roger Phillips in the garden at Rose Acres, California



Rosa sericea subsp. *omeiensis*
Photograph by Martyn Rix

9. SECTION **SERICEAE** A shrub with ferny leaves and arching branches. Thorns on the young shoots sometimes very wide. Flowers white, often with only 4 petals. Hips ripening and falling early, in May-July.

Rosa sericea hips with slender, green stalks

Rosa omeiensis hips with thick, red, stalks

forma *pteracantha* young stems with winged red thorns (the winged red thorns occur in different species including *Rosa hugonis*)

Rosa transmorrisoniensis

Rosa tsinglingensis Pax & Hoffm.

Rosa taronensis

Rosa morrisonensis

Rosa mairei

Rosa sikangensis

10. SECTION **HULTHEMIAE** Leaflets solitary, small, greyish; flowers yellow with a red spot at the base of each petal. 1 species in Xinjiang, westwards to Iran.

Rosa berberidifolia, syn, *Rose persica*.

Other species of uncertain affinity:

Rosa kweichowensis Yü & Ku

Rosa praelucens Byhouwer

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