

The Earthkind Explosion

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It seems especially fitting today that a group of plants with a reputation for being extremely care-demanding is producing totally care-free plants.

Begun in 1996 by Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension Service, testing to find Earthkind roses is now being conducted in 27 states and three foreign countries. A rose receiving the Earthkind designation needs no fertilizing, spraying, pruning, or deadheading, can thrive in great heat and humidity and acid or alkaline soils, and requires minimal watering.

The 2008 Earthkind Rose of the year is 'Madame Antoine Mari' , a 1901 introduction growing 6' x 6', hardy in zones 7 to 9, a fragrant pink blend tea rose that blooms repeatedly through the season. Also newly chosen is 'New Dawn' (1930, zones 4 to 9), a spring blooming large climber with fragrant pink-blushed white flowers.

So far 15 other roses have been given the Earthkind label: 'Belinda' Dream', 'Caldwell pink', 'Carefree Beauty', 'Climbing Pinkie', 'Ducher', 'Duchesse de Brabant', 'Else Poulsen' , 'Georgetown Tea', 'Knock Out', 'Marie Daly', 'Mutabilis', 'Perle d'Or', 'Sea Foam', 'Spice' and 'The Fairy'.

Lst May, the National Earthkind Rose Trail Garden opened on several acres of a park in Farmers Branch, TX. Over 400 roses are being tested there. In October, the city of Tyler, TX, became the home of the world's first Earthkind Botanical Garden. Nine universities in Zones 3 to 9 are now doing Earthkind testing , and park departments in many cities are adopting Earthkind minimum maintenance landscape management principles for all their planting.