

FIVE DAY ROSE OLYMPIAD

Many of us enter our roses in a couple of shows. But a pair of rose gardeners living quietly in Mississauga created a sensation in southern Ontario in 1994 by entering no less than four major rose shows and winning top awards in all of them! And this was in the space of five days!

Ismail and Gloria Elkholy raised eyebrows for their endurance record. Like most engineers Dr. Elkholy could not take a day off to attend every show, so Mrs. Elkholy proceeded alone early in the week. She brought 23 roses to Lambeth on June 21 plus another 15 for her husband. She brought as many to London on June 23. Ditto Hamilton/Burlington on June 24 and the same thing was repeated in Toronto on June 25! He told CR it was beginners luck. She obliged CR with the following rose story. Ed.

Our love affair with roses started really quite innocently about five years ago. My husband Ismail and I had been looking for a new joint hobby to supplement our usual ballroom dancing.

In the summer of 1990 we were visiting my parents in Victoria B.C., and went to see the Butchart Gardens. Well, we had both seen roses before; however, the show at the Gardens was so magnificent that we had to learn more. We bought rose books in Victoria and read each other passages from them. We were fascinated to learn of roses other than the 'Peace' roses growing in my parent's garden.

Then and there we decided to create our own miniature Butchart Garden back in Mississauga. We enthusiastically imported in our luggage six local Victoria roses, little realizing the West Coast stock would not be hardy enough for our Ontario climate. Alas, within two years, all six roses were dead. But not our enthusiasm.

Our first mission upon our return was to become members of the Canadian Rose Society. Here was our first contact with Anne and Paul Graber, who lent us some books on building a rose garden, and generously took us on a guided tour of their own lovely backyard collection. Ismail and I read, dreamed and designed, and within a couple of years, our rose beds swelled from a dozen roses to 188 at last count. Despite heavy rose losses in those first few years we patiently re-dug and re-planted deeper the ones that heaved but survived each winter. We haunted nurseries from Pickering to the Niagara peninsula in search of replacement and new roses.

In 1992, our rose activities were reduced temporarily. But after the birth of our son Alexander, we included him on our rose outings, and experienced our first rose show hosted by the York Rose and Garden Society in Toronto. I left the exhibit enthused and determined to show ours, with a secret dream of someday having the "Best Rose in Show" ourselves.

A year later, in 1993, we entered the novice category of three shows: Hamilton, London, and York. In Hamilton, our 'Blue Jay' floribunda spray caught the attention of a few judges who said that if it were competing in the full show it might have even won best in show. We were stunned. I was surprised to be asked by another competitor what fertilizer we were using. I thought at first she was joking. She wasn't! We were even more surprised to win over 60 ribbons and four trophies in the three shows.

Encouraged by our previous success, this past year, 1994, we entered four rose shows in earnest. We used a granular food for a month before the shows. About a week before, if the weather was cool, I applied a liquid fertilizer which forced the blooms to speed up. If the blooms were opening too quickly, we cut the rose stem and placed it in warm water with "Crysal" to slow it's development down. Ismail