

AN ACCIDENTAL EXPERIMENT WITH REFRIGERATING CUT ROSES

By Kitty Belendez

Bob and I had a busy and successful spring exhibiting season. By May 4th we had already exhibited at three large rose shows, bringing more than 100 cut roses to each of those shows for the past three Saturdays beginning on April 18th. We were exhausted. Although we have cut back on the number of rose shows at which we exhibit each year, down from 12, to 6 or 8 depending on our schedules and the weather circumstances (and hey we aren't spring chickens anymore) we knew there were two more rose shows coming up this spring. The Riverside rose show in May, and the



PHOTO BY KITTY BELENDEZ

Hybrid Teas on Day One

week that my rose bushes would have blooms.

So even though we were still exhausted from the previous three back-to-back rose shows, my adrenaline began to rush back after seeing some of the blooms still in my yard. However, the weather reports were not conducive to exhibiting fresh cut roses that are blue ribbon worthy.



PHOTO BY KITTY BELENDEZ

Floribundas on Day One

Keeping an ever watchful eye on the daily weather reports, I began to apprehensively cut just a few roses on Monday, May 4th, and cut some more on Tuesday, May 5th. Checking the

weather reports late that evening, windy high heat near 100 was expected the next day. So about 10 p.m. I got a flashlight and went out and cut some of the roses that earlier I had noted might be ready to be cut the next morning. I could not risk them getting damaged from warm overnight winds. I did this every evening after getting home from work that week, and by Thursday, May 7th my refrigerator was just about full of roses. I had planned to cut a few of the more delicate roses such as the antique roses Yolande d'Aragon, Rose de Rescht, and Baronne Prevost the



PHOTO BY KITTY BELENDEZ

Aqua Logic Temperature Controller

San Diego Rose show the first weekend in June.

Usually by mid-May we are finished exhibiting because by then we are exhausted, our roses are bloomed out for the first cycle, and the thrips have made their grand entrance, turning the rose blooms brown, scarred and ugly. It's usually too hot by then to spray insecticides so the roses are left to the elements until the fall rose shows.

Somehow I had mistakenly gotten in my head that the Riverside rose show was on May 9th, the day before Mother's Day. That made sense to me because it would probably be the last



PHOTO BY KITTY BELENDEZ

Chrysal Hydration Solution

first thing on Friday morning, if the heat and winds had spared them.

I keep my cut roses in a 6-foot wide floral refrigerator that I bought used from a florist about 10 years ago. Each stem is kept in its own separate "rose tube," which is made from a 4" diameter plastic irrigation pipe (of various heights from 12 to 18 inches) inserted into a 1/2-gallon cardboard milk carton, and then placed in plastic milk crates that hold either 9 or 12 milk cartons. Floribunda sprays are sometimes held in groups of 6 to 8 in a large floral bucket. The refrigerator

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is run by an Aqua Logic temperature controller, Model TR115SN that is set in the range of 35 to 37 degrees. The water in the tube is one cup of cold water with Chrysal floral preservative (1-1/2 teaspoons of Chrysal mixed in 1 gallon of water). Chrysal keeps the blooms from opening and is only used while the roses are under refrigeration, never at room temperature or warmer. Chrysal helps to delay the blooms from opening. I do not cover the blooms

Friday, May 8th, I took a vacation day from my regular office work so I could finish cutting a few roses in the morning, and then I planned to spend the rest of the day getting my tools and entry tags ready for the show, and just resting up for an early departure (the alarm was to be set at 2:30 a.m.). Luckily, at 7:30 a.m. I checked my e-

that I keep them in the fridge until next week and then write an article about the experience. So because there weren't many blooms left in my garden, I decided to keep the rest in the fridge all week and see what would happen to them. Except, I gave



10-Day-Old 'Moonstone'

PHOTO BY KITTY BELENDEZ

a big bouquet of the floribunda *Europeana* to my daughter Tina when she took me out to breakfast on Mother's Day, May 10th.

I kept the floral fridge (still set at 35 to 37 degrees) closed up tight all week. Bob and I work during the week and therefore do not leave the air conditioner running in the house while we are away, and even if we did the AC would not cool down the attached garage where we keep our floral fridge. So instead, I turned on

into the garage, and I was amazed that the garage remained at 67 degrees, while it was 97 degrees outside. This helped the floral fridge to remain within a constant range of 35 to 37 degrees. We have thermometers outside the house, inside the house, and inside the rose refrigerator to help monitor the temperature. I know from past experience that our garage can get very hot when the outside temperature is over 85 degrees.

On Tuesday, May 12th, I removed one week-old mini-flora, Show Stopper, from the fridge to see how it was doing. When lightly touching some of the blooms I was surprised that the blooms felt hard and solid, which is a strange feel for roses. What this meant is that the roses had held their crisp "substance," which is a very good thing. I recut the Show Stopper stem under plain cool water



10-Day-Old 'Whirlaway'

PHOTO BY KITTY BELENDEZ

and let it sit for two days in a cup on the kitchen counter. This little bloom, although it had become fully open and had lost its queenly "exhibition" form, was still very lovely with nice substance and color, and not at all wilted.

I had contemplated freshening the Chrysal water for all of the roses in the fridge and maybe recutting the ends of their stems under water. But because their substance felt so very good, I decided to leave them alone.

By Thursday, May 14th, we had decided to bring these refrigerated roses to the Riverside rose show. Unfortunately, that day I came down with a very painful sore throat and sinus headache. By Friday morning, I was too ill to even go to work so I

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10-Day-Old 'Robin Alonso'

PHOTO BY KITTY BELENDEZ

mail before going about my day's work. In an e-mail my friend Suzanne (who would be judging the show) pointed out to me that the Riverside show was not THIS week, but was in fact NEXT WEEK. I could not believe that I had gotten confused with the dates, and so checked the show schedule. Sure enough, the show was scheduled for May 16, not May 9th! What a letdown. I was alternately depressed, relieved, and disgusted with my stupidity.

Now I had to decide what to do with over 100 cut roses. Dump them in the trash and hope I had some roses for next week? Give them to my family and friends? Or keep them in the fridge until next week?

Suzanne half jokingly suggested



10-Day-Old 'Gemini'

PHOTO BY KITTY BELENDEZ

our alternate and more economical evaporative cooler and closed all the internal doors in the house, except the door from the house to the garage. We also removed the covers from the roof turbines to help hot air escape from the attic. The cold air from the evaporative cooler strongly flowed

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stayed in bed most of the day. I felt that after all this I HAD to get these roses to the show so that my story could have a chance at a happy ending, and I wanted to validate my experiment. In the late morning I dragged myself out of bed to cut a few

10-day Refrigerated Blue Ribbon Trophy Winners

Gemini, Court of Honor
Moonstone, Court of Honor
Robin Alonso, Mini-Flora Queen
Whirlaway, Mini-Flora King
Whirlaway, Mini-Flora Bowl

10-day Refrigerated Blue Ribbon Winners

Moonstone, 3 HT Blooms
Johnny Becnel, Floribunda Bloom
Fabulous, Floribunda Spray
Sexy Rexy, 3 Floribunda Sprays
Trumpeter, 3 Floribunda Sprays
Wing-Ding, Polyantha Spray
Verdun, Polyantha Spray
The Squire, Shrub Bloom

more fresh blooms and put them into the fridge, just in case I felt good enough to go to the show. By evening it wasn't looking like I was going to be able to get myself out of bed, as the alarm was set to wake us at 2:30 a.m. All night I tossed and turned, with a pounding sinus headache and sore

throat, wondering if I would be able to get myself out of bed at 2:30 a.m. Well, the alarm went off and when Bob said "Get Up" I knew I had to take these roses to the show.

It took an hour to get dressed, pack the roses, and get our gear into the van. We had 12 milk crates full of roses plus an 80-quart *Rubbermaid* cooler full of minis and mini-floras. It took another hour and a half to drive 90 miles to the show site, which we were unfamiliar with, but thank goodness for our trusty *Garmin* GPS.

Tips for Refrigerating Cut Roses

- * Cut blooms slightly tight
- * Set fridge thermostat in the 35 to 37 degree range
- * Use Chrysal floral preservative
- * Keep fridge closed
- * Keep room temperature at 70 degrees or less

We arrived at 5:00 a.m. but we couldn't begin preparation until 6:00 a.m. when they finally got the vases unloaded from their van, and they had no water source so we had to fill buckets of water inside the historic Mission Inn hotel bathroom. Since exhibitor prep was in the library parking lot across the street, we erected our pop-up tarp to help keep us in the shade. We worked feverishly (I actually had a fever!) for the next 3-1/2 hours to try to enter as many

roses as we could. I was very pleased that these roses were still looking quite good.

So how did these roses perform at the show? We brought about 170 blooms to the show, of which 90% were between 9 and 12 days old. We were able to make 53 entries comprising 79 rose stems. Of those 53 entries 26 received blue ribbons, all the rest received 2nd or 3rd place ribbons. And 7 of those blue ribbon winners went on to win trophies, 5 of which were roses that were 10 days old! Those are pretty good statistics for roses that almost went into the dumpster.

Notes:

Miniature roses blow open fairly quickly within a few days. Old garden roses (antiques) and some shrubs have a brief cut life of perhaps several days at most. The Squire shrub is one exception that can be refrigerated for a week or longer. We got no blue ribbons on any of the refrigerated antique roses, and in fact many had shattered before getting to the show. However, I was able to get a few 2nd and 3rd place ribbons on these roses.

How fresh and tight the bloom is when cut for refrigeration is a big factor in refrigeration life. I never cut my roses past their prime, and if anything will cut them just slightly on the almost tight side.

Chrysal #1 is available from rosemania.com for \$32.50 per quart.

PHOTOS FROM OUR GARDEN TOUR ON APRIL 26, 2009



PHOTO BY KITTY BELENDEZ

Garden of Tom and Jackie Cadman



PHOTO BY KITTY BELENDEZ

Garden of Joe & Stephanie Correnti