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with the Littleton Garden Club

Bare-root roses

BY MARY BINGMAN

Littleton Garden Club

"Are you really ready to order a relatively expensive bare-root rose through the mail?" That question scared me.

A treasured friend

had recently died, one who loved scented roses. He'd grown many varieties for years on his remote Vermont hilltop and shared names of his favorite varieties before his death. I pondered spending money on something I'd never grown before. I would have to learn a lot about roses and their care to honor him.

Joe loved a wide range of aromatic hybrid roses. Simply Magnificent Grandiflora was a cold-hardy one he felt I could tackle as a novice rose grower.

I reviewed the catalog of an internationally known grower and purchased it in the late fall. They stated that the bare-root grafted rose would arrive in the spring. It was to ship at the correct time to correspond with planting in USDA zone 3-4. Assurances were given that I'd be notified upon shipment.

Surprise! The rose showed up with no notice on May 2! Although it was packed carefully with clear planting instructions, I wasn't ready. The pitiful thing looked rather lifeless. It was nestled without soil in the shipping box, and the roots were wrapped in wet, shredded paper. 24 to 48 hours of soaking in a bucket was needed, followed by immediate planting.

As it soaked, I dug a hole (18 to 20 inches in diameter and 20 inches deep) at the back of my

sunny garden bed. I incorporated compost and readied mulch while the clock was ticking.

It felt odd to place spindly roots in the prepared ground with only bone meal as nourishment. One simple, one-inch cane cut before the soil got tamped down for support and mounded up slightly.

A stake was added to the side of the hole and below the bud union. Then, I tied on soft Velcro strips to use later as the rose would grow and need support.

Careful morning watering followed the planting. Before long, the canes greened up and started to elongate.

I was in awe when the warm early July sunlight hit that first big grandiflora blossom. You could detect the lovely fragrance from ten feet away. It was the star of the perennial garden bed. It looked stunning next to the deep purple flowering sage. Some blossoms and buds were saved and dried for crafts, and some were cut for waiting vases.

It was well worth the expense and worry. Those gorgeous lavender-pink velvety petals caused many a smile, and I felt true happiness from the accomplishment. A friend was remembered fondly.

For more information about the club and our meetings, please visit littletonnhgardenclub.org.