

The Artist's Almanac June 2006

Spring being a tough act to follow, God created June.

-Al Bernstein

This is the month for weddings, and no wonder. Sol comes nearest now, and earth bursts with flower and fruit. This is a season we might wish to last forever.

My first job earned one week's vacation after a year. Living in an apartment, with no money, my wife and I spent that week cruising the Harpeth River Valley, in awe of wild roses. Cascades of white and pink smothered the thorny hedgerows that kept the cattle at bay.

The meanest of us craves beauty, and may find it in our gardens. This is the month of the gardener. Lilies are blooming, as well as the magnificent magnolias. Larkspur, Shastas, sweet peas, dianthus, and snapdragons throng the front garden, with Japanese iris and waterlilies flourishing in the fishpond. Peonies, hydrangeas, hemerocallis, gardenias and chrysanthemums - each have their special beauty, but the beauty of them all is the rose.

The rose is with us all summer long, in every hue but blue. As houseguests they are fragrant, well behaved and long lasting, serving in glorious arrangements or bouquets. Outside, our front wall drips roses and they make a fragrant cover for an arbor leading to a rose-covered wedding bower.



Like all beauties, they demand attention – tender care and feeding. Their aggressive thorns, which protect them from children and dogs, are no armor against black spot and beetles. They must be dusted, sprayed, pruned, watered, and covered, yet the rewards are enormous, enhanced by our

devotion, and it is them we most miss in winter. The potpourri my mother made from her garden is my most fragrant memory.

They are a special challenge to the artist, who is humbled by his inability to capture them, to say nothing of being unable adding to their value. Their delicate textures and flesh tones are more difficult to capture with a brush than is flesh itself, and an artist caught up in counting their leaves radiating from their centers is liable to find himself lost in a swirling vortex of beauty. They are too alive for a still life, yet too demanding of individual attention to mingle with the commoner sorts in a cloud-backed landscape. Perhaps they are best depicted as the stars in the firmament of an arrangement - in the same starring roles they enjoy in the garden.

To be in the presence of a blooming rose is to reflect upon our own short duration. Perhaps music, that most temporal art, captures best this longing, as in the hauntingly beautiful tune by Stephen Foster...

*Ah! May the red rose live always,
To smile upon earth and sky,
Why should the beautiful ever weep,
Why should the beautiful die.*



Which brings us back to the subject of June weddings, as reflected upon by the bard who lived with his bride Anne Hathaway in a rose-covered cottage on the Avon

*From fairest creatures we desire increase
That thereby beauty's rose may never die.*

-William Shakespeare