

The BEAUTIFUL, BOUNTIFUL BANKSIAES

-- Jeri Jennings

copyright © 2002 Jeri Jennings - heritageroses@gmail.com

Written permission of author is required for all use

Species roses (those presumed to be of “wild” origin) are listed in the “R” section of Modern Roses II. There, you’ll find a listing for Rosa banksiae (R. banksiae), followed by other members of the banksiae family — principally:

- **R. banksiae banksiae**, Sp. w; dbl (14) William Kerr, 1807
- **R. banksiae lutea**, (Lindley) Sp. ly; dbl.; (14); 1824
- **R. banksiae lutescens**, (Voss), Sp. my; single; ca. 1870
- **R. banksiae normalis**, (Regel), Sp, w; single; (14) 1796, not distributed until 1877

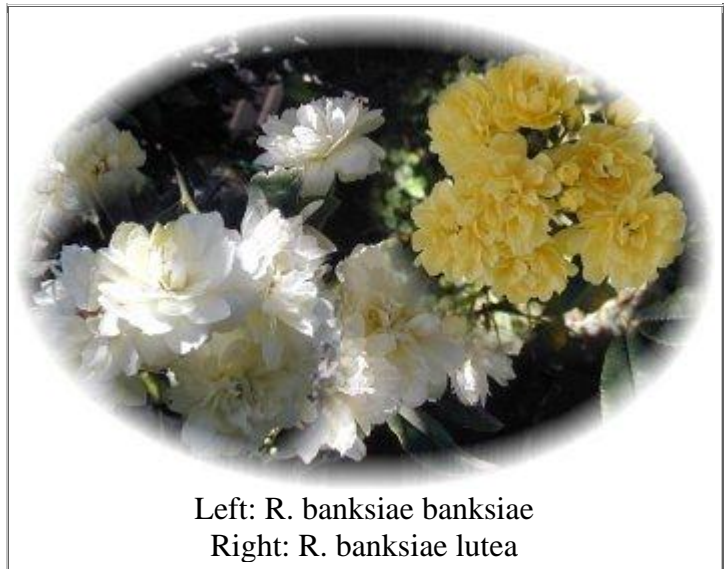
You’ll find **R. banksiae normalis** in the San Jose Heritage Rose Garden — the small white blooms are exquisite. I’ve only seen *R. banksiae lutescens* in photos. But EVERYONE in our area is familiar with *R. banksiae lutea* (“Yellow Lady Banks”) and *R. banksiae banksiae* (“White Lady Banks”). They’re so common in our area that it’s easy to discount them. That’s a mistake.

These roses are “common” because they’re GOOD. If you want a disease-free Climber, buy “Lady Banks.” Want a

rose that can tolerate a mild drought and come back fighting? Look for a banksiae. If you’d like a rose to climb a tree, cover a fence or wall, or hide an unattractive shed — **BUY A BANKSIAE!**

As a family, the banksaes offer dainty, dark green, glossy, foliage. At the height of their spring bloom they produce an astonishing amount of color, and though all of the banksiaes are officially “Once-Blooming Roses,” they will repeat in coastal Ventura County, often quite generously.

The first member of this interesting group seen in Europe was *R. banksiae banksiae* — the double “White Lady Banks” — collected by William Kerr for Kew Gardens in 1807. Kerr named his find in honor of the wife of Sir Joseph Banks, then the director of Kew Gardens. None of the banksiaes is reliably cold-hardy below 15 deg. F, so they didn’t make much of a splash in England, where the climate was too cool and damp to suit them. When brought to the Americas, however, these lovely roses came into their own. *R. banksiae banksiae*, usually relegated to a greenhouse in Britain, reached the American Southwest, and promptly morphed into the gigantic “Tombstone Rose.”



Left: *R. banksiae banksiae*
Right: *R. banksiae lutea*

The roses of the banksiae family don't much like to be pruned. Plant them where they can grow large and graceful, water them, and leave them alone. In a few years, they'll make a powerful garden statement.

Do you have still more space for large roses? Consider these relatives of the banksiaes:

R. fortuniana

R. fortuniana, best known as a popular rootstock plant for Florida gardens, is a fine rose on its own merits. Thought to be a “natural” hybrid of *R. banksiae* and *R. laevigata* (“Cherokee Rose.”), “Fortuniana” was collected in China, between around 1850, by Robert Fortune. Like the banksiaes, this is a graceful plant, with long, arching canes, and glossy, dark green foliage. The blooms, however, are much larger. They possess a lovely button eye, and offer the delicious violet scent of *R. banksiae banksiae*. Since it is believed to be a cross of two Species Roses, “Fortuniana” is listed by ARS as a “Miscellaneous OGR.”

This beauty, officially another “once-bloomer” will repeat in our climate. We have a young plant, collected in an old cemetery, where it almost always has a few blooms, despite neglect and drought. Here, it has water, and a fence to climb. We and look forward to seeing if it can match the bounty of its banksiae parent.

Purezza

‘*Purezza*’ has been talked about for years, but has been hard to find. Everything about it sounds intriguing.

According to *Modern Roses XI*, ‘Purezza’ was found, hybridized, and/or introduced in 1961. It is said to have come from Italy. Q. Mansuino is the listed hybridizer, and the recorded parentage is ‘Tom Thumb’ (a Miniature!) x *R. banksiae lutescens* (the single, yellow banksiae).

In appearance, ‘Purezza’ resembles *R. banksiae banksiae* — though the blooms are a bit larger, and somewhat flatter in form. **The main difference between *R. banksiae banksiae* and ‘Purezza’** is the increased ability to repeat bloom, inherited from its Miniature parent. Since the banksiaes already repeat for us, ‘*Purezza*’ should be a generous bloomer indeed, and well worth exploring.