



This shot was from the top of a ladder looking out over the Valentine crop. The buds are atop seven and eight foot tall plants.

Everything's coming up roses

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Roses are red,
Violets are blue
Sugar is sweet,
And so are you!

This simplistic poem is probably the first of such a child hears. Its thought has been repeated through the years in more complicated phrases. Valentines are the names given to these amorous notes. To have a Valentine accompany a dozen long-stemmed roses is a cherished symbol of affectionate admiration.

The rose is a flower lovingly tended by the home gardener or treasured when received as a symbol of love. It is much desired for special occasions such as weddings, proms, Mother's Day and Valentine's Day, to name a few.

In recent years, their value has risen dramatically to as much, in some areas, as over \$50 a dozen.

The Walton family at London Grove, Chester county, along with other rose growers in that vicinity, have found growing roses for cutting is far from "a bed of roses."

As with any other agricultural venture, long hours, special knowledge and skills and personal attention to detail are required to produce a quality commodity.

LANCASTER FARMING visited with the Waltons last week to get an idea of what cultivating roses for wholesale cutting involves. Frank and his brother Herbert own and operate Waltons' Roses and Frank's son Richard works with them along with several full-time and part-time employees.

The family has a long history in the greenhouse business as Herbert explained. At or even before the turn of the century, the two brothers' father grew violets in the greenhouse. Those were the most popular corsage flowers then. Later the elder Walton switched to the early varieties of carnations, then called "pinks." They were single petaled rather than full, ruffled carnations which are now popular.

Still later their father experimented with tomatoes and even grew some of the very first mushrooms in the area now known as the mushroom capital of the world. Frank Walton explained that the mushrooms were grown from spawn shipped from Europe and planted in beds under the tomato beds. "That is the last place you would see mushrooms being grown today," he grinned.

Frank graduated from Penn State in 1927 with a degree in horticulture. His brother Herbert graduated a year later. In 1929 the family constructed a huge, heavy

glass and metal greenhouse to grow roses.

The house, still used today measures 62 feet wide, 288 feet long and at the peak of the roof, probably fifteen feet high. Nearly the length of a football field, the greenhouse is sectioned off with long rows of beds running parallel to the long, side walls. The beds are raised off the dirt-floor level by several inches. Cement slabs eight feet long and less than a foot high and an inch thick form the sides of the troughs. The beds are 46 inches wide. Soil and compost along with vermiculite or some other porous substances are roto-tilled to planting condition. Rose stocks which have been grown in the open field by commercial growers for one year are then set into the soil one foot apart in each direction. In one running length of an eight-foot side slab are planted 32 rose bushes. In all, the Waltons have 12,500 rose bushes in the large greenhouse and an additional 5,000 bushes in a smaller glass greenhouse divided into three sections.

In both greenhouses, the rose bushes are trained to grow upright through a support system consisting of sections made with criss-crossing wires and bamboo sticks. The sticks lie horizontally above the beds to hold the wires in place. At any one time only a few of the beds have newly planted rose bushes in them. They grow profitably for four or five years; some do well for longer though, Frank Walton explained.

Once the roses are set in and start to grow stems and bud, they can be cut for up to a year continuously. By that time, the stems may be reaching a height of eight feet or more. Then they are trimmed back to a height of around eighteen inches and are allowed to start growing skyward once again.

To maintain a strong supply of rose buds for cutting in the fall, winter and spring months, growers trim the majority of the bushes in the summer months. As with other growing plants, fertilizer and disease and insect control play a major role in production.

Watering is done about once a week, according to Frank Walton, through a system of pipes and spray nozzles which direct the water across the top of the soil and not on the plant foliage. To increase the carbon dioxide content in the greenhouse's "air", — plants require CO₂ and give off oxygen when the sun shines — the family utilizes the exhaust from a CO₂ is forced into the greenhouse through plastic tubes running the length of the greenhouse.

To provide the heat for the greenhouse at night and when the sun does not warm it sufficiently, the Waltons stoke a coal-fired boiler. The 52-year-old dual-chamber furnace dwells underground next to the big greenhouse. As evening approaches, the Waltons bank up a good firebed to send warm water through the maze of pipes spreading throughout the house. Near midnight the fires are tended



Frank Walton checks the buds on roses now reaching above his head. The plants are set into soil prepared in 46 inch wide cement sided beds and trained up through a grid of wire divided sections.

once more. Toward the very early morning hours, Frank makes another trip from across the road where he lives with his wife in a large, white farmhouse to keep the fire burning hot enough to maintain the proper temperature in the greenhouse.

The smaller greenhouse is heated with fuel oil. Richard Walton remarked that it costs as much and more to heat the house with 5,000 roses as it does to heat with coal the house holding 12,500 roses. New conservation practices recently put into operation in the smaller house are double layers of plastic above the glass roof through which air is circulated to create a heat loss barrier and also installation of a plastic ceiling well below the glass peak.

When the sun shines sufficiently, the plants produce an average of 2500 cuttings a day, Richard explained. Sometimes the buds may number as high as 5,000 a day. They are individually cut by hand with a penknife every day of the week. They are cut early in the morning, then sorted, graded and

put into cooling rooms until shipment to wholesale buyers. Waltons' roses go to wholesalers who service New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia markets as well as florists in the immediate locality.

Once sorted according to bud shape, stem quality and color, the roses are bundled in lots of 25 each then placed stem ends in buckets of water and then into cooling rooms to hold their freshness.

Their retail value in some local areas may be as low as \$22 while they may cost as much as \$55 in other metropolitan areas, the Waltons said. Imports are posing a threat, but because of their perishability, roses have not been imported to the extent that carnations have. The Waltons added, "Imports have practically ruined the local carnation growers."

The Waltons grow 60 per cent red roses. The remainder are about equally divided between the pastels of yellow, white and pink. "We never have enough of any one

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Two young women sort out the roses after the day's morning cutting. Risa Wertz and Deana Murphy separate them according to a quality into bundles of 25 each before they are placed in a cooling room. They are working on yellow roses in this picture.

Homestead Notes



Frank Walton's son, Richard, is placing the sorted, graded, roses into one of the two walk-in cooling rooms.