

A City in Love with Roses

One city's high impact - low maintenance landscape solution

As you drive through the streets and neighborhoods of Palmerston North, NZ you soon see that this city has a serious thing going on with roses. There are around 400 different varieties growing within the city boundary (who knows how many individual plants), yet it's thanks to one particular rose that everyone gets the message – loud and clear – that Palmerston North is Rose City.

But first some background: “The oldest international rose trial garden in the southern hemisphere was established here in 1969”, explains Hayden Foulds, who is connected with Palmerston North's rose-related activities on many levels. A member of the New Zealand Rose Societies National Council, he manages the Rose Society's internet presence. Hayden is a practicing horticulturalist working in a large wholesale nursery. His father Charles has had a long involvement with horticulture (and therefore roses) in the city, is currently Operations Manager at the city's events venue, Arena Manawatu.

Looking around the city it's easy to see that a deliberate decision has been made to side-step the usual landscaping options – turf, something tough and knee high or just paving – and plant massed roses instead. “The first plantings were made in the late 1990s, around the time the Flower Carpet rose was released. The main route between the city centre and Massey University needed to be widened from two to four lanes. They removed the old trees, carried out the road work then replaced the trees with new stock set further back, and underplanted with Flower Carpet Roses.”



Massed planting divides pedestrians from road traffic with a glorious ribbon of massed Flower Carpet Pink roses.



Above: Flower Carpet White

Left: Flower Carpet Appleblossom and Pink ring the pond in the Dugald Mackenzie Rose Trial Garden where the bushes help stop small children from falling (or jumping) in.



The result has been a long term success, not just in extraordinary good looks, but also bliss-of-maintenance. Once a year, after the trees have dropped their leaves into the rose beds below, the council teams cut the roses back to 10-20 centimetres (4-8 inches) high and clear away the prunings and leaf debris in one move. It's easy to see why Flower Carpet roses were marched out across the city.

This is the rose that you notice as you drive around. It stands out, not only because it's dense and covered with flowers, but because so many square metres around the city have been devoted to it. You'll find Flower Carpet roses planted along sidewalks and median strips, in roundabouts, and even surrounding the Arena Manawatu.

Palmerston North's climate is known for having short summers and winters with long springs and autumns. Highs in summer are around the mid 20's C (high 70's F); winter lows sit around 5 C (40's F). As for rainfall Hayden explains. "We're not as drought prone as the NZ east coast, but in March we had 8 millimetres (< 1/2 inch) for the entire month. All the lawns browned off but the roses performed well." The City's rose plantings enjoy a short period of establishment irrigation, but they're soon left on their own.

As for cost, Hayden agrees that in this city, it's almost cheaper to maintain a massed bed of Flower Carpet roses than turf. You certainly don't need to mow roses and people don't wear muddy patches across them. "In our climate, they have flowers for nine months and stay green year round, apart from when they've just been cut back. They do get some fertiliser, but they don't need to be sprayed and they thrive on the water that falls from the sky."

Median strips and curbside plantings are hostile sites to green; many end up under hard surfacing treatments. Here Flower Carpet Appleblossom roses soften and dress up the space with a low maintenance solution.



Massed roses like Flower Carpet Pink are an easy-care landscape treatment anywhere, but especially in residential areas.