

Sea Tomato ~ Rosa rugosa

By Kim Smith

Excerpt from *Oh Garden of Fresh Possibilities! ~ Notes from a Gloucester Garden:*

“Particularly lovely for a small garden are the single flower form of species roses, native *Rosa carolina*, ‘Sweet Briar’ rose (*Rosa eglanteria*), and rugosa roses. One might assume that beach roses (*Rosa rugosa*) are native to America as they have naturalized and are seen growing prodigiously along the seashore. *R. rugosa* was introduced from China to New England in 1845. Rugosa orchards thrived in coastal communities. The edible fruits are too seedy for modern palettes accustomed to seedless varieties. ‘Sea Tomatoes’ are rich in Vitamin C and the seeds contain Vitamin E. Hybrids with rugosa parentage, ‘Sir Thomas Lipton’ and ‘Thérèse Bugnet,’ for example, make beautiful specimens in the border all year round with their gracefully arching stems. Both are extremely hardy with a repeat blooming habit, sweetly fragrant, and ‘Thérèse Bugnet’ has deep rose-red canes for winter beauty.”

Although not a true native New England shrub, the beautiful beach rose has found its way into the hearts of those of us who love life at the edge of the sea. The relatively large, single, papery-fine flowers open from late spring through the first hard frost in shades of deepest pink, rose, and white. The heavenly scented blossoms are followed by fleshy and edible orange-red rosehips. During the 1800’s and early nineteenth century when it was cultivated as a food crop, *R. rugosa* was commonly referred to as Sea Tomato. Today the hips are gathered to make rose hip preserves and tea.

Rosa rugosa goes by an array of descriptive common names— Beach Rose, Japanese Rose, Beach Tomato, Sea Tomato, Saltspray Rose, Hamanasu (Japanese - "Shore Pear"), and Haedanghwa (Korean - "flowers near seashore")—to name but a few. Having escaped from orchard and garden, not only has *R. rugosa* naturalized throughout the Atlantic coast, Washington State, and Alaska, but also throughout Northern Western Europe. Beach rose is found in sixteen European countries and is considered extremely invasive in Sweden, the Netherlands, and Denmark. *Rosa rugosa* is a fast-growing hedging plant that thrives in salty, moist coastal climates. Beach rose forms great thickets that help stabilize dunes and provide food and shelter for wildlife. We have observed all manner of different species of bees foraging for nectar, often three or four simultaneously nectaring within a single blossom. The native climate of *Rosa rugosa* is comparable to the climate in these regions, and it thrives well in its new range. *R. rugosa* has several ways of spreading, by seed and by rhizome, both of which have contributed to the naturalization of the species. The seeds are dispersed by birds and also have the extraordinary ability to float in fresh and saltwater for weeks, and still remain viable. *Rosa rugosa* grows successfully in coastal areas, especially dunes, because it is salt tolerant and adapted to moderate sand cover.

Appreciated and grown for its fragrant blossoms, vitamin C-rich fruit, and ability to help

prevent erosion, the negative side of growing *R. rugosa* is that wherever a non-indigenous plant is found growing, it has displaced a native plant. To remove *R. rugosa*, the plants would have to be cut back and pulled out by root and rhizome for many years successively. *R. rugosa* is proliferative, posing a near-impossible task that would require unrealistic amounts of manpower and funding. What is the solution to the dichotomy of balancing the destructive tendencies of a culturally beloved, albeit non-native, plant, versus appreciating that same plant for its attributes and for beauty's sake, whether *Rosa rugosa*, lilac or butterfly bush? Perhaps the common sense solution is to learn all we can about the ecology of our community, what to re-plant, protect, and nurture, and how to monitor these habitats, which will then help mitigate the damage created by the monocultures of introduced species.

Beauty on the Wing ~ Life Story of the Monarch Butterfly. Please join me at the Manchester Public Library on Saturday, October 31st at 11:00 am for an artist talk, slide, and video presentation. *The program is free and all ages are welcome!*

Kim Smith Designs is an interior and garden design firm. Smith's first book *Oh Garden of Fresh Possibilities!* (David R. Godine, Publisher, 2009), which she wrote and illustrated, is available through your local bookseller and Barnes and Noble. She will be happy to respond to questions and comments at kimsmithdesigns@hotmail.com. For more information about *Oh Garden of Fresh Possibilities!*, butterfly gardening, current projects, exhibits, and events, please visit her website at www.kimsmithdesigns.com.

Rosa rugosa and Bombus

