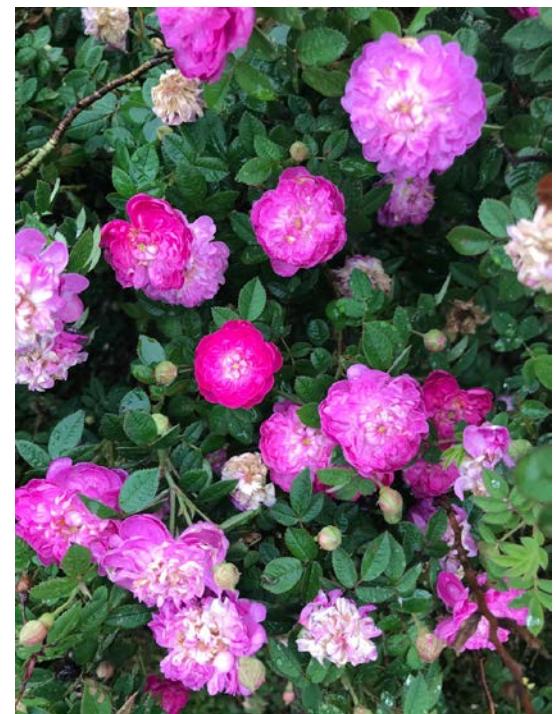




THOMAS JEFFERSON AND ROSES

Thomas Jefferson first documented roses in his earliest Garden Book entries when, at age 24 and still living at Shadwell, he recorded, “April 4, 1767 planted suckers of Roses....” Cultivated roses during the mid-18th century were either once-blooming European varieties or native species such as wild Virginia or Carolina roses (*Rosa virginiana* or *R. carolina*). There are several options for Jefferson’s “suckering” roses, but most likely they were the Apothecary’s Rose (*R. gallica officinalis*), an ancient rose species native to southern, central and eastern Europe, with large, semi-double, crimson flowers. In September 1771 Jefferson first specifies a rose by name—Sweet Briar Rose (*R. eglanteria*)—for his landscape at Monticello. This large, once-blooming European shrub with single, blush-pink flowers, is distinguished by its apple-perfumed foliage, densely prickled stems, and long-lasting hips. By 1782, Jefferson included “a Calendar of the bloom of flowers” in his Garden Book, listing “crims. Dw. Rose” flowering from May through June. While this dwarf crimson rose could have been the Apothecary’s Rose, it is possible he was referring to the Burgundian Rose, *Rosa x centifolia* ‘Pompon de Bourgogne,’ a low growing, once-blooming variety with rosy purple flowers, which was in cultivation before 1664.

But Jefferson’s 1791 request for roses from the William Prince Nursery in Flushing on Long Island, New York, was the most significant and detailed. On July 6 Jefferson ordered three each of ten European rose varieties, of which, on November 8, he received two each of the following: Moss Provence, Yellow Rose, Rosa Mundi, Large Provence, Monthly, White Damask, Prim Rose, Musk Rose, Cinnamon Rose, and Thornless Rose. At that time, America’s love affair with the rose was barely beginning, and the Prince Nursery list was typical of what was obtainable in the United States. Although British and European gardens were acquainted with upwards of 200 roses by the 1780s, in America the selection, especially of home-produced roses such as those from the Prince Nursery, was more limited.



Pompom de Bourgogne



Apothecary's Rose

Some of these predominately spring-flowering roses undoubtedly found their way to Poplar Forest. Apothecary's Roses, common in early American kitchen gardens for its medicinal and culinary uses, could be the "rose bushes" noted in Jefferson's 1811 planting memorandum for February 21, 1811 for the "N. side of [the patch], at W. end," Jefferson was likely referencing these same bushes in his instructions to "weed roses" growing with the gooseberries and strawberries, etc.

Jefferson's December 1812 planting memorandum for Poplar Forest suggests roses were used in the mixed landscape plantings on the right and left banks on the south side of the house where the following were planted: "a row of lilacs, Althaeas, Gelder roses [*Viburnum opulus roseum*], Roses,

Calycanthus [Sweet Shrub]." Large, vigorous roses that would appropriately compliment the surrounding shrubbery in this location could include the European Musk Rose (*Rosa moschata* and *R. moschata plena*), which, unlike the spring-flowering roses, bears fragrant, single to double white flowers from June through frost.

Finally, Jefferson's November 1, 1816, Poplar Forest planting memorandum offers more clues for roses in the ornamental oval flower beds on the North Front: "Planted large roses of difft. kinds in the oval bed in the N. front," and "dwarf roses in the N. E. oval..." This reference to "large roses of different kinds" suggests his desire to add a variety of rose types, which could include the Musk as well as the White (*Rosa alba maxima*), and the large Provence or Cabbage Rose (*R. x centifolia* 'Major').

During the early 1800s Jefferson was on the cusp of a sea change in rose culture in the West, especially with the newly introduced ever-blooming roses from China. His desire to create a garden of roses at Poplar Forest reflected an emerging trend as the popularity of roses gained momentum in America.

Peggy Cornett, Curator of Plants, Monticello



Musk Rose