

My Love Is Like a Six-Foot Rose

'Extreme' Blooms Offered for Valentine's Day Make an Impression on the Wallet, Too

By [Adrian Higgins](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer

Monday, February 5, 2007; Page A01

If love were an arms race, the wooer would now have the floral equivalent of a ballistic missile: a six-foot rose from Ecuador.

Delivered in a 78-inch box emblazoned "The World's Tallest Rose," the ultimate long-stemmed rose is up to 72 inches long and capped with a furred and individually wrapped crimson bud three inches high and almost as wide. Regular long-stemmed roses, by contrast, are about 28 inches long with a bud an inch and a half wide.

As with true love, the price of these "extreme roses" is not for the faint of heart. Expect to pay \$249.95 for a dozen, plus \$59.95 for priority shipping. A conventional bouquet will typically cost between \$70 and \$90 in advance of Valentine's Day next week, the peak period for cut-rose sales and prices.

"People who are giving flowers want to make an impression, and this is the ultimate impression you can make," said Gerald Prolman, whose online flower company, Organic Bouquet, is selling the tall roses as part of an exclusive arrangement with grower Roberto Nevado. Nevado has created the roses as a niche crop in rich soil where the Andes meet the equator, the perfect recipe for supersize blooms.

In addition to the stem length and bud size, other parts of the plant are gargantuan: The leaves are large, the buds have as many as 60 petals or more, and the stems are as thick as your finger and thorny. As with most roses bred for cutting, the fragrance is stinting, however.

One variety, Forever Young, is a deep crimson. The other, Red Intuition, is a lighter red with blood-red streaks. Buyers don't get to select the variety, and Prolman, who expects to sell out of his allocation of 500 bunches by Feb. 14, says he is releasing a quota each day to avoid an immediate sellout.

"Do they supply a stepladder?" asked Stephen Scanniello, a rose historian from Barnegat, N.J. Prolman, based in San Rafael, Calif., doesn't see his roses as freakish; rather, he considers them a potent and novel message of love at a time when so many hearts are vying for attention.

Americans last year bought 189 million roses for Valentine's Day. Three out of four buyers were men, according to the Society of American Florists. The jumbo roses, Prolman says, are "a grand romantic gesture."

The roses are grown naturally and are neither genetically modified nor infused with hormones. But that may not make them exactly natural in the eyes of some observers.

[Enlarge This Photo](#)



The "World's Tallest Rose" dwarfs Gerald Prolman of Organic Bouquet in San Rafael, Calif. The price of a dozen: \$249.95. (Organic Bouquet)

PHOTOS From Today's Post



Nikita Floyd, left, owner of Green Forever, explains a client's sidewalk preferences to foreman Santos Medrano, center, so he can translate the instructions for Juan Salvador. (Marvin Joseph -- The Washington Post)

[SEE FULL COLLECTION](#)

[Feedback](#)

"They look like something from outer space," said Dokhi Mirmirani, a florist in Sherman Oaks, Calif., whose clients include Hollywood celebrities. "The magnitude is pretty awesome."

She said "men like them because they're massive and romantic." It also telegraphs their wealth, she said. Prolman's wholesale division made them available to Mirmirani and others last year, and the florist used them to adorn the Beverly Hills home of a pop star she wouldn't name except to say that "she's beyond famous," and "she loved them."

Florist Cherrie Silverman of Westminster, Colo., used them on two floats in the Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade on New Year's Day. "People were flipping out," she said. "I was actually amazed by it."

My Love Is Like a Six-Foot Rose

Several florists interviewed had no aesthetic objection to them but said they would be difficult for any sweetheart to use, and that the roses may be better employed in hotel lobbies, at museum events and at wedding receptions. Even large vases would look too small and the impulse would be to shorten the stems, they said, defeating the point of the roses. Prolman sells a 24-inch galvanized metal vase to go with them (\$79.95, plus shipping).

Jordan Amige, president of one of Washington's largest wholesale florists, Potomac Floral Wholesale in Silver Spring, had them available last year for a while. "People said, 'It's beautiful, it's different, it's huge. But what do I do with it?'"

Event planner and florist Jay Watkins of the Ociana Group in Northeast said the extreme rose would work in the grand setting of a museum event, "but where else would we have it?"

Prolman and Nevado are bullish on extreme roses and have no doubts about their future. Nevado said he intends to increase production if sales go well this winter in the United States and Russia, the two largest markets for them.

Nevado says roses have bulked up a lot since he started in the mid-1960s. When he began, he said, buds were little more than an inch high and stems just a few inches long. But as Ecuador and neighboring Colombia have grown to dominate the rose-growing industry, the flowers have become more colorful and diverse, "so the market is going to be more and more complicated, with definite niches," he said.

Roses grow robustly in the equatorial Andes, where a year-round growing season, intense sunlight and cool nights result in extremely vigorous plants. Nevado and other growers are licensed to produce the roses by hybridizers who own the plant patents.

Red Intuition and, more commonly, Forever Young, are raised by other Ecuadorian farmers but are harvested as shorter-stemmed plants, said Liza Atwood, founder of Fifty Flowers, an online bulk flower retailer based in Ojai, Calif.

Nevado's extreme roses are produced through pruning techniques and by waiting a month longer than normal to harvest the flower, almost 100 days. They produce only six to seven long stems per plant per year, he said. Nevado has approximately 100,000 bushes of Forever Young and 300,000 of Red Intuition at his two farms in the mountains south of Quito. One farm is at 9,000 feet, the other at 9,700 feet.

The extreme roses were first grown for the Russian market, where long-stemmed red roses are highly desired, especially on March 8, International Women's Day. Nevado's workers had to cut them shorter to fit the shipping boxes, "and that was a frustration because they took an extremely long time" to grow, he said.

They may be the longest-stemmed roses in the world, but they are not the largest rose plant, said Scanniello, author of "A Year of Roses." A Lady Banks climber in Tombstone, Ariz., planted around the Civil War, now spans 70 feet.