

Europa-Rosarium Sangerhausen: Blooming Garden Splendor and Gene Sequences

As if a brightly colored cloth had been swept across the green hills of the southern Harz foothills, the Europa-Rosarium lies between fields and the old town of Sangerhausen. Around 80,000 rose bushes grow here, making this location a highlight among Saxony-Anhalt's "Garden Dreams." But it is about more than just romantic reverie: in the world's largest rosarium, science is also in full bloom.

Every visitor enjoys the gardens in their own way. Some simply drift through the splendor, observing and smelling the blossoms - or use their smartphone not just to photograph the beauty, but also to listen to stories via audio guide: What is the story behind Goethe's "Heidenröslein"? Why should the fairy tale be called "Little Prickly Rose"? And how did the tea rose get its name?

Around 80,000 rose bushes of 8,750 varieties

Other visitors head straight for one of the playgrounds or the glasshouse restaurant - or to the rose café, where even rose-flavored ice cream and rose cake are served. Some gather at the main entrance for a guided tour. But most unfold a site map to quickly locate sensations such as the black roses or to explore the rosarium systematically. Though, that's easier said than done: About 80,000 bushes from 8,750 rose varieties stretch across 13 hilly hectares on multiple levels. Only a few flowerbeds follow straight rows. Most roses group themselves loosely, mingle with other flowers, herbs, and shrubs, or frame sculptures, fountains, gravel paths, and seating areas.

Since 1903: A Noah's Ark for European garden roses

The romantic layout still follows a botanical system, ensured by Thomas Hawel, director of the rosarium. To explain why the world's largest rose collection ended up in this small mining town, he turns to history: "At the end of the 19th century, increasing numbers of Chinese tea hybrids flooded into Europe, revolutionizing the market and threatening to displace the garden rose varieties especially bred in England and France. So, the German Rose Society wanted to create a Noah's Ark for European garden roses." The men began searching for a site and received several land offers. But the city officials of Sangerhausen responded fastest and, without any commercial interest, donated 1.5 hectares of the city park. The area was fenced in and, starting in 1903, planted with rose donations from across Europe. Today, some of the varieties collected at that time survive only here in Sangerhausen.

Even today, historic, newly bred, and wild roses continue to arrive in Sangerhausen and require space in the rosarium. "That's why our facility is relatively strictly structured," explains Hawel. "Market availability forms the basis for categorizing roses into wild species, historical varieties, and modern breeds; their physical stature sorts them into shrub, bedding, and climbing roses. We also have a fragrance garden and an area that outlines the evolutionary history of the rose."

German Rose Gene Bank preserves valuable genetic heritage

But it is not just about visual splendor. Signs in some flowerbeds explain why even comparatively frail and delicate specimens are allowed to stay. Alongside beauty, science plays a significant role here. Certain wild and cultivated roses have special significance: They are registered in the German Rose Gene Bank (DGR). Inspired by the Rio Earth Summit, gene banks like this exist for many important cultivated plants - such as apples and wheat. These banks aim to preserve valuable genetic material, stored in the form of living plants across multiple locations, to secure biodiversity for conservation and breeding purposes.

The German Rose Gene Bank - the first subnetwork of the German Ornamental Plant Gene Bank (DGZ) - has been developed in Sangerhausen since 2009. However, genetic sequencing itself is not performed on-site but at institutions like the Leibniz University in Hanover. "There, researchers determine which gene sequence is responsible for a particular trait, such as bloom color, size, fragrance, or resilience" Hawel explains. In breeding, this allows breeders to predict desired traits in future generations based on the genes of the parent plants - or avoid undesirable traits.

Up to 100 varieties a year are "ennobled"

Which varieties are added to the Sangerhausen collection - and which are "ennobled" by being included in the gene bank's 3,500 varieties - is determined annually by Hawel and other experts. "For the rosarium, we select 50 to 100 mostly German and European varieties each year. We also integrate wild roses with defined origins, rare varieties, and roses with especially outstanding traits. Between 150 and 200 rose species and varieties are admitted to the gene bank annually after their verification - that is, their unequivocal identification." Given his broad responsibilities as keeper of the rose genome, is Thomas Hawel allowed to have a favorite variety? He is - and does: "My favorites change from time to time. Right now, I especially like the historic Portland rose 'Mme. Boll' (bred by Boll, 1843). But I also really enjoy the modern bedding roses 'Spotlight' (Kordes, 2023), 'Hansesstadt

Rostock' (Tantau, 2010), and 'Darling' (Noack, 2024)."

And where on this expansive site is the director's favorite spot? "The wooden pavilion from 1899, from where you can look far across the historical part of the garden." Incidentally, this is also where the summer rose consultations take place - a part of the colorful events program.

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More information:

<https://gartentraeume-sachsen-anhalt.de>

<https://www.europa-rosarium.de>

<https://www.sangerhausen-tourist.de>

Pictures (IMG/Volkmar Heinz):

Thomas Hawel, a horticultural engineer, is the director of the Europa-Rosarium Sangerhausen since 2005.

Agricultural engineer Gerhild Schulz has photographed and classified thousands of roses. For around 6,000 roses, she has created herbarium specimens by pressing and cataloguing their blossoms and leaves.

Additional assets available online: [Photos \(4\)](#)

<https://press.invest-in-saxony-anhalt.com/2025-07-24-Europa-Rosarium-Sangerhausen-Blooming-Garden-Splendor-and-Gene-Sequences>