

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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In Memoriam: David J.C. Austin (1958–2026)

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The floriculture industry recently lost one of its most influential ambassadors with the passing of David J.C. Austin, chairman of David Austin Roses. His father, David C.H. Austin, is credited with revolutionizing rose breeding by creating the now-iconic English rose. He combined fragrance, romance and the form of heirloom roses with the repeat flowering, vigor and reliability of modern cultivars. However, it was his son, David J.C. Austin, who brought that vision to a global audience and bred one of the most iconic garden roses of all time.

According to *The Los Angeles Times*, David joined the family business in 1990 and guided its transformation from a respected specialty nursery into an internationally recognized brand, expanding its reach to more than 40 countries. Under his leadership, David Austin Roses grew its dedicated cut flower breeding program into a global enterprise, with approximately six million stems sold annually, helping redefine what growers, designers and consumers came to expect from a premium cut rose.

One cultivar changed the conversation. Introduced in 2004 after 15 years of breeding and an investment of approximately \$4 million, Juliet became the first rose released from David Austin's dedicated cut flower breeding program. It's still one of the most commonly recognized garden roses brides will ask for by name.

Juliet has richly cupped apricot petals and is the textbook definition of a romantic garden rose. Juliet not only has the fragrance and aesthetic of a traditional English garden rose, but it can also provide consistent shaped and colored blooms with fantastic vase life. Its success helped usher in the modern garden rose movement within commercial floristry. Juliet still inspires breeders across the world to develop garden-style cut roses for the luxury floral market.

Today, Green Valley Floral in California has the exclusive rights to producing Juliet in the United States. This is one of the many ways David Austin ensures that only premium stems of Juliet enter the marketplace. The flip side of this arrangement is that most local flower farms will never have the opportunity to grow Juliet commercially.

However, David Austin's legacy reaches far beyond a single rose. There are other roses in his collection that specialty cut flower growers cultivate that don't have exclusive growing rights. Whether featured in a farmers

market bouquet or a wedding arrangement, these roses continue to connect all who enjoy growing them or experiencing them through a shared appreciation for beauty.

In its tribute, the Royal Horticultural Society shared that David's children remembered him this way: "First and foremost, Dad was a gardener." It's a fitting remembrance for a man whose life's work gave the world a fresh new take on English roses, making them more accessible to gardeners and growers. **GT**