

Hibbs Brief

Hibbs Institute for Business & Economic Research

Tyler: The Rose City

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Tyler is known as the “Rose City.” We see Tyler logos associated with roses everywhere. We have a rose festival every October, a large rose garden that receives thousands of people every year (visitors and locals) and a rose museum that tells nice stories about the city in East Texas and its history that began nearly 100 years ago.

When I moved from El Paso a few years ago, I knew that Tyler competed with renowned producers of roses in California and Colorado. Later, I learned that Tyler, in addition to rose bloom production, was one of the largest producers of rose bushes in the nation. And, perhaps, several rose producers in California or Colorado began their massive production by purchasing two-year grown rootstock plants from Tyler and its vicinity.

At some point, after a long history of rose production, cultivation and processing, Tyler earned the nickname of the “Rose Capital of America.” The rose plant industry in East Texas dates to the mid-late 1800s, with the first recorded sale of rose plants in 1879. The first train carload was shipped in 1917. By the late 1950s, rose growers in East Texas produced about two-thirds of garden rose bushes used commercially in the United States every year. Over 30 million plants were grown and harvested yearly by about 300 growers within a 50-mile radius of Tyler. In the fall each year, millions of rose bushes were shipped from Smith County to 48 states in the nation and 25 foreign countries.^{1&2}



Rosebushes were packed and shipped to rose producers nationwide and 25 foreign countries in the 1950s.



By the end of the 1930s, more than 200 companies or individuals were growing roses commercially in East Texas.

By the 1950s and the 1960s, Tyler was highly recognized as a large producer of rose blooms and a major grower of rose bushes nationwide. A sandy soil, nice climate and generous rainfall were the main advantages of Tyler rose growers to producers in California, Arizona and Oregon, who saw drier weather. However, new irrigation technologies became available in the 1970s, while an overabundance of rainfalls in Tyler turned a previous benefit into a fungi problem. Rose growing conditions in Tyler and East Texas became challenging. As a result, former rose growers developed business partnerships with companies in California and Arizona. Rose plants (bare-rooted) were shipped to East Texas for packaging and distributing. The rose industry in Tyler gradually shifted from nurseries growing roses and rose bushes to companies specializing in rose handling processes.³

The annual rose festival is an emblematic celebration in Tyler, Texas. This annual festivity took place for the first time in October 1933. It was organized by local rose growers and the chamber of commerce with the purpose of promoting the rose industry in the region.⁴ Since then, 87 years later, Tylerites receive several thousand visitors from many cities nationwide during the third week of October every year.⁵ In 2019, the Tyler Rose Festival hosted nearly 125,000 people, of which more than 50,000 were visitors attending any of the numerous traditional events, such as parades, concerts and coronations. The Tyler Rose Festival is a relevant contributor to Tyler's economy; and Visit Tyler estimated an economic impact of almost \$3 million over the three-day festivity in 2019.

The Tyler Municipal Rose Garden was officially opened in 1952. Most of the roses were donated by several local nurseries, while the city gave \$5,000 to pay for labor and supplies to set up the garden. Additionally, recognized nurseries from Pennsylvania, New York and California donated the newest rose varieties to complement the local rose selection. As a result, the Tyler rose garden became famous, and it is continuously visited by rosarians from all over the world.⁶ Tyler's rose garden is the largest in the United States, with an area of 14 acres that has over 35,000 rose bushes of at least 500 different varieties.⁷



The rose industry in Tyler shifted from growing to packaging and distributing roses.



Original invitation to the 7th Annual Texas Rose Festival in 1939.



The Tyler Municipal Rose Garden today..

International trade has had an important impact in the nation's rose industry. The United States has steadily lost market share to imported roses over the past few decades. South American countries, Colombia and Ecuador, are strong producers of roses these days. With an abundant, low-labor cost compared with the United States (major cost in the production of roses) and an ideal climate year-long, these countries account for about 90 percent of all roses sold in the United States last year.⁸

Conditions have changed from the 1950s when Tyler was a predominant player in the rose industry nationwide. Some local producers have evolved and adjusted to the market, while others have migrated to a different industry, or even a different economic activity. Nevertheless, the greenhouse, nursery and floriculture production industries have a relevant presence in the Smith County economy. The Hibbs Institute has estimated that \$85.3 million of output may be attributable to the greenhouse, nursery and floriculture production industry in 2019. This number includes direct, indirect and induced multiplier effects in Smith County. We have also calculated the employment supported by the industry in the county with 879 jobs.⁹ More importantly, the rose industry is responsible for thousands of individuals who have pride recognizing and honoring their local history in **Tyler, the Rose City**.

Special Thanks!

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¹ Pemberton, H.B. (1992). "The Texas Rose Industry"; Texas A&M University Agricultural Research and Extension Center.

<https://easttexasgardening.tamu.edu/the-tyler-rose-industry/>

² Information extracted from archived documents in the Tyler Rose Museum.

*The pictures were obtained from the Texas Archive repository: "Story of the Rose Industry at the Tyler Rose Museum."

https://texasarchive.org/2010_00953

³ Information obtained via a short conversation with Mr. Paul Breedlove, third generation of local rose growers at Breedlove Nursery & Landscape.

⁴ Information extracted from archived documents in the Rose Museum.

⁵ The Rose Festival was canceled in 2020 as a precautionary measure to avoid the spread of the novel corona virus during COVID-19 pandemic.

⁶ Information extracted from archived documents in the Rose Museum.

⁷ Information extracted from the Visit Tyler Department website.

*Photos obtained from archived documents in the Rose Museum and the Visit Tyler Department website.

<https://www.visitt Tyler.com/tyler-municipal-rose-garden/>

⁸ US International Trade Commission. "Fresh Cut Roses from Colombia and Ecuador" (Publications from several years).

⁹ Estimates calculated using the Economic Contribution Analysis methodology and the IMPLAN V3 software.

