To Each His Own Theory

by A. E. ALBERA

ROSES have fascinated me for a long time. Mother grew them by intuition. Father tried more scientific methods. Using the two systems, plus a few of the magic formulas suggested by a neighborhood genius, they managed to kill a lot of roses (and grow a number of healthy plants).

My initial bout with roses began when I bought a house. I scooped out holes along a fence and stuffed the bushes into them. Like the man from Texas, I shot first and investigated afterward.

Later I read rose literature and consulted botanists until both became repetitious. One section of my notebook was a symposium on cow dung, where I recorded the opinions of 30 authorities. Soon I realized there were as many theories as authorities. The only thing they agreed about was that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

I remembered an old maxim, "deliver me from the man who has read just one book." Certainly the beginner may be misled if he happens on the wrong book. Conversely, the man who reads too much is apt to be in a state of perpetual quandary. To complicate the situation further, a gentleman comes along who says, "Now if you want good roses, I'll tell you what to do..." He's likely to suggest egg shells, coffee grounds, soapsuds, feathers, steel shavings or soot from the chimney. In fact, he'll tell you to put everything from old horseshoes to Peruvian guano in the rose bed. It seems all rose growers are looking for a witch's brew that will make their plants grow like the banyan tree.

Actually, little scientific research has been done with roses and most of what we know has been drawn from comparative practice. Conditions vary and all advice must be taken with a liberal sprinkling of salt. Each grower must consider his own little patch of earth and decide whether a bit of information applies to his specific situation. All we can really do is to assist nature by trying to remove obstacles.

If rose growing were an exact science, the fun would be gone. The back yard gardener would no longer enjoy the challenge of experimenting, discovering and competing at garden club shows.

I don't mean you can grow roses without good care. They are living organisms and need food, drink and protection. So gather all the information you can and weigh it carefully. Then try it—but not on the whole garden at once.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The author's opinions do not necessarily coincide with those of the editors. But as a dedicated rosarian, past president of the Denver Rose Society and winner of enough ribbons to make a Maypole, we think his opinions should be heard.