

To Find

# ALBERTA'S PRICKLY ROSE

by ROGER H. VICK\*

"Is this THE wild rose of Alberta?"

A visitor to our Province, touring the Botanic Garden last season, wanted to make quite certain that he was looking at the 'genuine article'. He was not.

A flowering plant of our official Floral Emblem was quickly brought to his notice, and a few details pointed out that always serve to separate it from the less honoured species. Within a few minutes he was confidently pointing out the plants of Prickly Rose that were mixed with the other common wild rose of this region.

I would estimate that this visitor's new found ability to identify our Provincial flower is shared by less than 15% of resident Albertans! If you would like to join this select minority read on, for there is nothing mysterious nor difficult in the exercise.

The 'Wild Rose' was chosen by the school children of Alberta about 1929 to be the floral emblem of this Province, and while we have THREE native species of wild rose, it was the one with the widest distribution within our boundaries that was officially selected, *Rosa acicularis*, the Prickly Rose.

The three can hardly be identified with confidence by their flowers which are pink in each case (with occasional plants that produce white or almost red blooms). To find our floral emblem we must look beyond leaves and flowers, and find the first clue to identity in the location of the plant. (See the range maps attached).

The natural distribution of our Prickly Rose extends to all but the grassland south-east corner of the Province. As we move north to the less arid central and north-eastern areas of Alberta, we enter a region where our Alberta Rose is very much at home and where it does not commonly associate with its two kindred species. Point to any wild rose growing in the area and it is most likely to be our floral emblem.

But what about all those 'difficult' regions where two, or all three species could be found growing side by side? This is where a closer look at the plant is called for, so let us look at each of the three species in turn.

The **Prairie Rose** (*Rosa arkansana*) is the species less likely to be confused with our own. It loves those dry hillsides and exposed plains where lack of winter snow protection causes it to die back every year almost to the ground. The secret of its persistence under such adversity lies in its ability to sprout quickly from the roots and produce clusters of flowers and fruit on the new wood. Comparative dwarf, it only reaches a height of from 8 to 16 inches.

The two other species are taller, (4 feet or more), and flower on shoots that appear from older wood.

The **Common Wild Rose** (*Rosa woodsii*) is so similar to the Prickly Rose that the flowers of this one doubt have been photographed on many occasions, and sometimes been published as our floral emblem. The imposter is not to be blamed, for a glance at the growing shoots quite sparsely set with prickles reveals its true identity to all who would read the signs.

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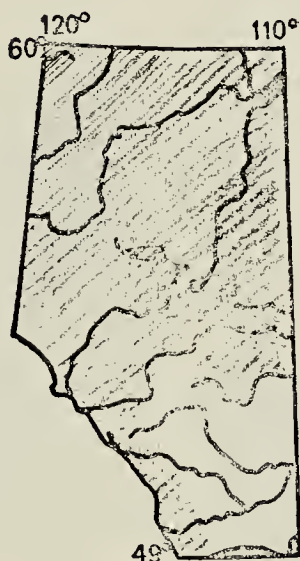
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The **Prickly Rose** (*Rosa acicularis*) provides the clue to its correct identity in the specific name *acicularis*, which means 'needle-like', and refers to the thorns or spines that are densely set right up to the very tips of the new growing shoots. Unlike the other roses, the fruit of this species are often more elongated or pear-shaped, and become soft and pulpy by late summer when the round fruit of the Common Wild Rose is still very firm and dry. These succulent Prickly Rose hips, dried and ground, are probably the most satisfactory of our native species

in the preparation of rose-hip tea (but use hot rather than boiling water, to preserve the vitamin C).

Like the pioneers who first settled this land, the Rose of Alberta will 'arrive' just a little ahead of its kin-folk. So be prepared when the dainty pink flowers smile at you from woodland borders and grassy slopes next June, and their scent begins to fill the evening air, to announce with pride and conviction to all those who would hear: "THIS is our ALBERTA Rose."

Shaded areas show where Alberta's wild roses are commonly found under natural conditions.



PRICKLY ROSE  
Alberta's floral emblem



COMMON WILD ROSE



PRAIRIE ROSE