



OPINION COLUMN

There are probably more dandelions in Ontario than wild roses in Alberta [↗](#)

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Albertans have been proud to have their provincial flower printed on their licence plates for three decades. But in 2014, politics got in the way, and a decision was made to remove the words “Wild Rose Country” from licence plates.

I’ve only been to Alberta a few times, and I don’t remember seeing an abundance of wild roses. I’ll bet dollars to doughnuts that there are more dandelions growing in Ontario than wild roses in Alberta.

On a day-long stopover in St John’s, Newfoundland last week, Cheryl and I took a short hike up and down Signal Hill and what did we see? Wild roses. Lots of wild roses. They were happily growing in rocky soil, accompanied by oodles of other wild flowers.

Signal Hill, just steps from downtown St John’s, is a National Historic Site celebrating the city’s defence history. The Hill offers spectacular views of the Atlantic, the harbour, the city of St John’s and the surrounding area.

Visitors to Signal Hill obediently stick to gravel pathways in order to protect the natural fauna and allow plants to grow undisturbed. Even with the hundreds of tourists walking the trails, I did not see as much as a single neglected Coke can or candy wrapper.

Wild roses are resilient. At Signal Hill there is virtually no topsoil. It is rare for there to be no wind, and winter conditions on the Hill are punishing.

Here in Ontario when we grow hybrid tea roses, we plant them with care in good clay soil, and give plenty sunshine. We add bone meal when planting and then regularly apply fertilizer through spring and summer. We combat the aphids and rose chafers and struggle to keep fungus at bay. The results are rewarding. With a bit of effort we can grow some pretty impressive roses.

Since the implementation of Ontario's Cosmetic Pesticide Ban in 2009, the popular hybrid tea, Floribunda and Grandiflora roses have taken a dive-bomb. Although still available, the traditional roses have largely been replaced by newer, carefree roses that grow with little effort.

'Knockout' roses are a popular series of roses that flourish under neglect. The plants grow three to four feet high with equal width and produce clusters of flowers in pink, yellow and red. Knockout roses are very hardy and very dependable.

Equally easy to grow are 'Flower Carpet' roses. Flowers in all colours appear all summer long in colourful clusters. As the name suggests, 'Flower Carpet' roses are low lying with arching cascading limbs that will look great in the foreground of taller plants behind. These roses have attractive dark green foliage, are drought resistant and are rarely bothered by insects or disease.