

CUTTING EDGE



Blue ROSE

ROSES COME IN MANY HUES, but for a long time blue roses appeared only in the dreams of flower-lovers the world over. The quest to breed such a flower was so challenging that the phrase “blue rose” became synonymous with “non-existent.”

In 2004, however, Suntory Ltd. of Japan and Florigene Ltd. of Australia finally succeeded in their joint efforts to develop this elusive shade. When they started their research almost two decades ago in 1990, many attempts had already been made to develop a blue rose by cross-breeding other varieties. However, the genetic make-up of roses does not contain the pigment required to create the color blue. Using biotechnology, the researchers worked tirelessly to extract genes and introduce them to create blue shades into roses.

In 1991 they succeeded in extracting the gene that produces blue shades in petunias, but unfortunately attempts to implant it into roses ended without color changes. In 1996 the development team successfully retrieved a similar gene from pansies and implanted it into roses. Following further research, the world’s first blue rose came into being in 2004.

Work is now underway to make the blue rose commercially available for the autumn of this year. The day may soon come when bunches of blue roses will grace your local flower shop.



LEFT: The Suntory rose development team.

PHOTO: The world’s first blue rose.