Tea roses, or tea-scented China roses, as they were first called, appeared in London about 1810, from a cross between Rosa gigantea and Rosa chinensis. They were called tea-scented because their fragrance seemed reminiscent of a newly-opened chest of tea. (In those days, tea was shipped from the Orient and sold to English households in small wooden chests.) Because their ancestors lived in a temperate climate in China, these tea-scented China roses did not need a dormant period and bloomed almost continuously in favorable climates. Unfortunately, their Chinese heritage rendered them somewhat tender and difficult to grow in colder climates. Some growers grew them as greenhouse plants; others tried to improve the cold hardiness by cross-breeding. Several interesting results were produced by crosses with the Bourbons. This created a new race of tea roses, most of which were quite unlike the old ones: large, vigorous, thick-limbed shrubs, usually with perfectly healthy, beautiful glossy foliage.

These new roses also brought with them several new characteristics not found in then-current European roses. Among these new features were a wider range of colors and a high-centered bloom that was the precursor to our modern Hybrid Teas. These new colors ranged throughout the rose palette (reds, pinks, whites, blushes, yellows and oranges), but most unique to Teas are the colors of dawn: tones of gold, warm pink, and rose shading into each other, with delicate tints and high-lightings. These new innovations, particularly the coloring, caused tea roses to be immensely popular for more than 100 years.

Perhaps the definitive book on tea roses is *Tea Roses: Old Roses for Warm Gardens*, written by six ladies from Australia, with whom Sandra and I had the good fortune to meet and chat with. Brent Dickerson's books, *The Old Rose Advisor*, *The Old Rose Adventurer* and *Old Roses: The Master List* are also treasure troves of information.

Canton, in southern China, had a number of nurseries, including the now world famous Fa Tee Nursery. Roses shipped to England were often 'rested' in India to give the roses a better chance of surviving the long voyage to England. In particular, the Howrah Botanic Garden, near Calcutta, was frequently used to give plants a chance to recover from the rigors of sea shipment. Before the invention of the glass-framed Wardian Case in 1833, plants were exposed to the elements, including salt water spray, on the open decks of sailing ships, causing many roses to die from salt water exposure.

An interesting sidelight is that because many roses sojourned in India on the way to their final destination, it was sometimes mistakenly thought these were Bengal roses.

Tea roses were an immediate hit in Europe and quickly spread to the rest of the rose-growing world. Hybridizers from Italy got into the production of tea roses, and Brent Dickerson reports that a number of tea roses with Italian names are listed in French nursery catalogs from 1825.

As with many areas of historical roses, there is no definitive information on many early tea roses. All but one ('Hume's Blush Tea-scented China’) of the tea roses introduced before 1830 are thought to be extinct. According to research by Brent Dickerson, some 250 tea roses were introduced between 1830 and 1840. Most of these are also probably extinct, but several notable exceptions still exist. 'Devoniensis' is the offspring of 'Parks' Yellow Tea Scented China' and 'Smith's Yellow China’ and was introduced in 1838 by Foster of Devon, England.
'Safrano' was introduced in 1839 by Beauregard of France and is a seedling of 'Parks' Yellow Tea Scented China', the parent of several fine teas, including 'Perle des Jardins' introduced in 1874 by Levet. Once the most important yellow rose grown, an 1889 magazine writer enthused: "Its large, full, well formed, canary yellow flowers, borne on stiff stems, make this variety especially desirable for bouquets and artistic floral decorations, while the dark and glaucous foliage of the plant furnishes an excellent setting for the fragrant, delicately hued blooms." 'Perle des Jardins’ does have a tendency to ball in humid weather, but the blooms are truly lovely.

After a series of hard winters in the late 1840's killed many of the tea roses in England, there were fewer teas introduced and the cold-hardy Hybrid Perpetuas became very popular. However, several noteworthy teas were introduced including 'Gloire de Dijon' introduced by Jacotot in 1853. This was a relatively cold-hardy rose and was used to breed a series of teas called the Dijon Teas. (but sadly, there was no mustard yellow rose...)

Another somewhat hardy rose was introduced in 1857. This was the great 'Duchesse de Brabant', introduced by H.B. Bernede, Bordeaux, France. 'Duchesse de Brabant' has been selected as an EarthKind rose because of its hardiness and disease resistance.

The 1870's were a period of tea rose resurgence. Although tea roses were still the roses for the wealthy, with many being grown in greenhouses, others grew them in pots and moved them into sheltered areas during the winter. 'Marie van Houtte' was introduced by Ducher in 1871. One of the most beloved of Tea roses, ‘Marie van Houtte’s’ broad, cupped flowers are creamy primrose with an outer rim of rosy pink, paling to creamy white and blush in warm weather.
Tea roses remained popular until the first World War, but fewer teas were being produced by breeders and the worldwide depression caused many people to rethink how they spent their money. Over the last several years however, Old Garden Roses have become very popular, and Tea Roses are, once again, darlings of the rose world.

Tea roses currently available include the following:

- ‘Homere’, introduced by Robert et Moreau, 1858
- ‘Smith's Yellow China’, introduced by Smith, 1834
- ‘Bon Silène’, introduced in France by Eugene Hardy, 1837
- ‘Fortune's Double Yellow’, discovered growing in a very old Chinese garden in 1845
- ‘Gloire de Dijon’, introduced by Jacotot, France, 1853
- ‘Lady Hillingdon’, bred by Lowe and Shawyer, UK, 1910
- ‘Mons Tillier’ Bred by Alexandre Bernaix, France, 1891 (Earthkind)
- ‘Devoniensis’, introduced by Foster, UK, 1838 (climbing form, 1858)
- ‘Marie van Houtte’, introduced by Ducher in 1871
- ‘Mrs. B. R. Cant’, raised by British hybridizer Benjamin R. Cant in 1901
- ‘Duchesse de Brabant’, 1857 (EarthKind)
- ‘Mme Joseph Schwartz’, sport of ‘Duchesse de Brabant’
- ‘Hume's Blush Tea-Scented China’, introduced 1809 by A. Hume

Just out of curiosity, I looked up tea roses in Modern Roses 12. There are 1,156 tea roses listed!