ORIGINS OF THE COMPASS ROSE
http://www.gisnet.com/notebook/comprose.php

The compass rose has appeared on charts and maps since the 1300's when the portolan charts first made their appearance. The term "rose" comes from the figure's compass points resembling the petals of the well-known flower.

Originally, this device was used to indicate the directions of the winds (and it was then known as a wind rose), but the 32 points of the compass rose come from the directions of the eight major winds, the eight half-winds and the sixteen quarter-winds.

In the Middle Ages, the names of the winds were commonly known throughout the Mediterranean countries as tramontana (N), greco (NE), levante (E), siroco (SE), ostro (S), libeccio (SW), ponente (W) and maestro (NW). On portolan charts you can see the initials of these winds labeled around the edge as T, G, L, S, O, L, P, and M.

The 32 points are therefore simple bisections of the directions of the four winds (but the Chinese divided the compass into 12 major directions based on the signs of the Zodiac). For western apprentice seamen, one of the first things they had to know were the names of the points. Naming them all off perfectly was known as "boxing the compass".

There is no absolute standard for drafting a compass rose, and each school of cartographers seems to have developed their own. In the earliest charts, north is indicated by a spearhead above the letter T (for tramontana). This symbol evolved into a fleur-de-lys around the time of Columbus, and was first seen on Portuguese maps. Also in the 14th century, the L (for levante) on the east side of the rose was replaced with a cross, indicating the direction to Paradise (long thought to be in the east), or at least to where Christ was born (in the Levant).

The colors on the figure are supposedly the result of the need for graphic clarity rather than a mere cartographical whim. On a rolling ship at night by the light of a flickering lamp, these figures had to be clearly visible. Therefore the eight principle points of the compass are usually shown on the compass rose in black which stands out easily. Against this background, the points representing the half-winds are typically colored in blue or green and since the quarter-wind points are the smallest, they are usually colored red.

The 32 Points of the Compass

Point	Direction	Azimuth	Point	Direction	Azimuth
0	North	0° - 0'	16	South	180° - 0'
1	N by E	11° - 15'	17	S by W	191° - 15'
2	NNE	22° - 30'	18	SSW	202° - 30'
3	NE by N	33° - 45'	19	SW by S	213° - 45'
4	NE	45° - 0'	20	SW	225° - 0'
5	NE by E	56° - 15'	21	SW by W	236° - 15'
6	ENE	67° - 30'	22	WSW	247° - 30'
7	E by N	78° - 45'	23	W by S	258° - 45'
8	East	90° - 0'	24	West	270° - 0'
9	E by S	101° - 15'	25	W by N	281° - 15'
10	ESE	112° - 30'	26	WNW	292° - 30'
11	SE by E	123° - 45'	27	NW by W	303° - 45'
12	SE	135° - 0'	28	NW	315° - 0'
13	SE by S	146° - 15'	29	NW by N	326° - 15'
14	SSE	157° - 30'	30	NNW	337° - 30'
15	S by E	168° - 45'	31	N by W	348° - 45'

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More on Compass Roses:

Chart Compasses
http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~feegi/compass.html

More Compass Roses from Portuguese Nautical Charts (images)
http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~feegi/rose.html

Gifts with a compass rose theme (these are quite nice)
http://www.thecompasscompany.com

Links to Historical Maps:

History of Cartography
http://www.geography.wisc.edu/histcart/

Oddens' Bookmarks
http://oddens.geog.uu.nl/index.html

Nautical History:

Why The Moonraker Is The Tallest Sail
http://www.gisnet.com/notebook/great_sails.php