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## Basic Rose Care

With their variety of colors, flower forms and growth habits, roses can find a happy home in all gardens, whether you favor romantic cottages gardens, tidy shrub borders or easy-care naturalistic landscapes. It's not wonder that roses are one of the most popular landscape shrubs, and often one of the most rewarding. On these two pages you'll find some of our tips for growing healthy and happy roses.

1. **Purchase only #1 roses as bare-root or potted stock.** Watch out for "packaged" roses of #2 grade that have languished on a shelf for too long. Buy only healthy-looking plants.
2. **Purchase disease-resistant varieties.** Our nursery has a list of varieties we offer for sale, with their degree of disease resistance noted.
3. **Plant in at least 6 hours of sunlight, preferably with morning sun.** The morning sun helps to dry the foliage early in the day, which helps the plant resist fungus diseases.
4. **Give plenty of water in well-drained soil.** Apply water at the base of the plant, not overhead. *Never keep the root zone soggy.*
5. **Provide good, compost-rich soil.** Add extra compost when you plant, then add a 2-3" thick layer of mulch around the rose (keeping mulch away from the canes) to control weeds and conserve water. Cooler root zones require less watering.
6. **Give your roses plenty of nutrition (or, "Roses Are Real Pigs").** Roses require a lot of food in order to produce the best-looking flowers. We recommend our **Perennial, Rose & Flower Food 15-15-10 with Fish Meal**. Be sure to add some alfalfa meal around each plant, as well as **Epsom salts** and **dolomite lime**. Work these into the soil around the rose.
7. **Provide winter protection.** Although our Puget Sound climate is pretty mild, the temperature can sometimes dip quickly to dangerous lows. Applying a thick, insulating blanket of mulch will insure against loss. Apply a 6" deep mound of bark, compost or leaves, with soil, around each rose.
8. **Prune for health.** When pruning roses, your goal is to maintain healthy, well-shaped plants that put on strong growth and bear beautiful flowers. An unpruned rose can waste much of its energy on weak, spindly growth that produces mediocre flowers. Thoughtful pruning helps produce a larger, healthier plant with a better display of flowers. **(Flip over this page for more pruning tips.)**
9. **One of the most common complaints** of current, former, or hesitant would-be rose gardeners is roses' tendency (especially in our climate) to develop fungal diseases such as black spot and powdery mildew. In dealing with these diseases, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. To help prevent disease organisms from taking hold and flourishing, we recommend spraying weekly with our fresh **Organic Live Compost Tea** (see our related info sheet). Another good product is Green Light's **Rose Defense**, an organic product that uses Neem seed oil as its active ingredient. Neem oil is effective not only against fungal diseases, but against pests that prey on roses, such as aphids and whitefly. Please read the product label before use!

**NOTE:** Our roses were bare root until January, when they were transplanted into their attractive plastic pots. **Keep your rose in its pot until the fall.**

For more tips on how to care for your newly potted rose, ask for a copy of our **"Newly Potted" Bare Root Care Guide.**

If you have any questions about rose care or pruning, feel free to stop by and talk with us one-on-one. Or check your public library, bookstore, or even your gardening friends' bookshelves for books on rose care and/or pruning. Here are a few recommendations:

- The **Sunset Western Garden Book** is has a large section devoted to roses and their care.
- The American Horticultural Society's **Pruning & Training: A Fully Illustrated Plant-by-Plant Manual**, by Christopher Brickell and David Joyce (*Dorling Kindersley, 1996*). Excellent photos, drawings and instructions on how to prune just about anything.
- The November/December 2002 issue of **Organic Gardening** has a helpful rose pruning article.

# Winter Rose Care and Pruning Basics

## Timing and Basic Techniques

- The best time to prune most roses is while they are dormant (or nearly dormant). In our area, many gardeners use President's Day as a guideline for when to prune their roses.
- Using sharp pruners, make angled cuts no more than  $\frac{1}{4}$ " above a healthy bud or leaf that is facing in the direction you want a new shoot to grow. The cut should be neat and clean (again, use sharp pruners) and angle away from the bud, so that water does not collect in the base of the new shoot.

## What to Prune, Part 1

- Remove dead or diseased wood, any old and unproductive canes, and any stumps left from the previous year's pruning that did not produce worthwhile shoots. (You can actually remove dead or diseased wood as soon as you notice it, regardless of the time of year.)
- Remove shoots that are less than pencil thickness. These are less likely to flower, and more likely to succumb to diseases like black spot.
- Remove any shoots growing into the center of the bush, or, if removal will make the bush too bare, shorten the shoot to a low, outward-facing bud. This helps maintain a well-shaped, open-centered form, which helps improve air circulation and prevent the fungal diseases that can plague roses.
- If two branches are rubbing against each other, or look like they will grow to rub, remove one of them, or shorten it to a bud or side shoot.
- Cut damaged branches back to just above a bud to stimulate a replacement shoot.

## What to Prune, Part 2

After you've taken care of the pruning priorities listed above, you'll want to cut back some of the growth your rose put on during the previous season. But before you turn into Edward Scissorhands, remember that roses store nutrients in their woody canes, so a larger plant is generally a stronger plant. Therefore, don't whack your roses way back unless all you want is a few, large, exhibition quality flowers. The amount you will cut off depends on what kind of rose you are pruning, because different types of roses grow and flower in different ways.

- **Hybrid tea & Grandiflora roses:** Cut back between one-third and one-half of the previous season's growth.
- **Floribunda roses:** cut back only one-fourth of the previous season's growth, and leave any strong new canes. Floribundas are generally grown for their abundant *number* of flowers, rather than for individual flower quality.
- **Miniature roses:** Cut back to half their height, being sure to remove all weak and twiggy stems.
- **Shrub roses, including English & David Austin roses:** These roses vary so much in growth habit that there is no universal way to prune them. Generally, they should not be pruned as hard as hybrid tea roses. Cut them back lightly during the dormant season.
- **Landscape roses:** Little formative pruning is needed. Once established, cut out any dead or diseased stems and prune main stems lightly, if needed, to keep them in bounds.
- **Climbing roses:** For the first 2-3 years, prune only to remove dead, weak or twiggy wood. After that, if your climbing rose produces flowers only in the spring, prune it just after bloom, removing the oldest canes if they show no signs of strong new growth. If your climber is a repeat bloomer, prune in February. Remove the oldest, unproductive canes and weak, spindly growth, then cut back the lateral branches on the remaining canes to within 2-3 buds of the main canes.
- **Tree roses:** Follow the regular pruning guidelines, with the goal of maintaining a symmetrical form.

## Other Winter Care Tips

In late November-early December, do a little clean up to help prevent fungal diseases from overwintering on your roses.

- Cut off any leaves that remain on the plant (this also helps force the rose to go dormant), clean up any fallen leaves and debris from under the plant and add a fresh layer of mulch.
- If you have been struggling with rose diseases, consider doing a light pruning at this time, followed by a second light pruning around President's Day.