

Caring for Roses

Take a Field Trip

You will have many years of enjoyment if you take time when selecting a rose bush. The International Rose Test Garden at Washington Park, Portland, Oregon, has over 550 different varieties of roses, and nearly all are available on the market. Some tips:

- Go in the morning before the fragrance has volatilized; take time to smell the roses.
- Select disease-resistant roses; a good catalog offers that information.
- Order in the fall for delivery in January; this is a good time to plant.
- Roses are either grafted to a root stock or grown on their own stock; either performs well.

Site Selection

Roses need at least 6 hours of sun during the growing season, April through September.

Planting

Next to selecting the right rose, proper planting is probably the most important task.

- When planting a rose from a container, dig a hole twice the width of the container and the same depth as the soil in the container. If the rose is bare-root, dig a hole twice the diameter of the roots when spread out. Use a spading fork to crack holes in the side and bottom of the hole.
- Remove root and soil from the container and place in the hole. Check to be sure that the soil level remains the same after planting. If planting a bare-root rose, mound soil in the center of the hole to lay the roots over. Soil level should be 1 inch below the bud union when planted.
- Amend native soil with at least 2 inches of compost; mix in well. Also mix in ½ cup bone meal per planting.
- Fill the hole with the amended soil mix.
- Space roses at least 33 inches apart, as measured from the center of one plant to the center of another.
- If replacing a rose, mix at least 2 inches of compost with native soil and add 2 cups of alfalfa pellets.
- Mulch 2 to 4 inches around each bush to retain moisture.

Watering

- Roses should receive 1 to 2 inches of water a week – a rule of thumb is 2 to 4 times a week for 30 minutes each time. Stick your finger in the soil to check if the root zone is moist after watering.
- Water in a way to minimize splash – keeping the leaves dry will reduce disease problems. If that is not possible, then water early in the day.

Fertilizing

- The Portland Rose Society formulates a fertilizer for roses. It is a 15-10-10 formulation. This means it contains 15% nitrogen (N), 10% phosphorous (P), and 10% potassium (K).
- Apply ½ cup per plant when new growth is 4 inches long and every 6 to 8 weeks during the growing season. Work into the soil and water.
- If a rose is doing poorly (minimal new growth, smaller leaves), place a cup of alfalfa pellets around the base of the plant. Apply once during the growing season.

Pruning

- *Mid-February major pruning:* open up the center for good air flow.
 1. Identify the strongest and youngest canes, usually smooth and green in color;
 2. Cut dead, diseased or damaged stems back to healthy branches;
 3. Remove non-productive, aging canes (rough in texture and dark in color) as close to the base of the plant as possible;
 4. Remove canes that grow toward the center of the plant, thus crossing other canes; and
 5. Remove canes which are crowding each other.
 6. All pruning cuts should be made above a bud and cut at a 45° angle away from the bud.
When finished, there should only be sturdy, healthy canes radiating from the base of the plant.
- *Deadheading:* remove all spent blooms.
 1. When removing the last spent bloom, cut just above a leaf with 3 or 5 leaflets.
 2. The higher the cut on the stem, the quicker the re-bloom, although the blooms will be smaller. The lower the cut, the longer it will take to re-bloom, but the flowers will be larger.
- *November pruning:* shorten canes to reduce wind damage to roots.
 1. For hybrid teas, grandiflora, and floribunda roses – shorten all canes to 2 to 2.5 feet. For climbing roses – between November and January, remove all short, upright canes from the main canes. They can be cut leaving 2 bud eyes (usually 2 to 4 inches) or cut flush to the main cane. Remove old, unproductive canes; tie new canes to a support structure. Tie main canes to a fence so that they are horizontal on the support, or, using a trellis, bend the canes horizontally across. This way, side stems will grow from each bud on the main canes and produce flowers at the end of each vertical stem.
 2. Remove all leaves. This pushes the plant into dormancy.

Insect and Disease Control

- Choose disease-resistant plants.
- Provide good air circulation through proper pruning.
- Keep rose beds clean by removing all diseased leaves from the plant and the ground.
- Apply a dormant spray for diseases or pest eggs that might be over-wintering on the canes. For specific instructions of which products, call Master Gardeners at the Horticulture Helpline listed below.

OSU Extension Service Resources

Visit your OSU Extension Service <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/> for these publications:

Controlling Diseases and Aphids on Your Roses EC 1520

Mulching Woody Ornamentals with Organic Materials EC 1629-E

Master Gardener™ Advice

- Call Home Horticulture Helpline: 503-655-8631 (Clackamas County), 503-821-1150 (Washington County), 503-445-4608 (Multnomah County).
- For 10-Minute University handouts and class schedule, visit www.cmastergardeners.org or www.metromastergardeners.org.
- Look for Master Gardeners at area Farmers' Markets.

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