

Pruning Roses

The main purposes of pruning are:

1. To improve the appearance of the bush,
2. To stimulate growth,
3. Control over-wintering bugs and diseases, and
4. To control the quality and quantity of blooms.

Tall, thin canes produce more but smaller blooms. Fewer, thicker canes result in fewer but larger and better quality blooms. Light pruning is not recommended for most hybrid teas because tall, spindly bushes result. Moderate pruning means removal of 1/2 - 2/3 of the existing bush, while hard pruning leaves only 3-4 canes 8 to 12 inches long.

Bushes are always improved and never killed by pruning. Unpruned roses bloom on small cane tips, go to seed, and become dormant. Poor or "incorrect" pruning is better than no pruning at all. The general rule is to prune strong-growing bushes moderately and weak growers severely.

When to prune

Fall pruning is normally done around Thanksgiving. Bushes should be cut back to about half their original height and leaves should be removed. This will prevent winter winds from whipping the bushes and loosening the root systems. Removing the leaves is done for hygienic reasons because insect eggs and fungal spores overwinter on leaves. It is a good practice to mound soil or mulch 6 to 8 inches deep around the plant to protect it from winter damage.

Spring pruning is usually done during the second week of March around south Puget Sound -- a week or so later at higher elevations. First remove the mounding material to expose the lower plant and canes. Then follow directions below on "How to prune."

How to prune

- Don't be afraid to prune even if there's new leaf growth. It will grow back healthier and fuller. Roses that are left unpruned can become a tangled mess of old and new canes all competing for air and light.
- Take out all dead wood and crossed or twiggy growth. Remove all thin, weak canes that are smaller than a pencil in diameter.
- Keep the center open for good air circulation almost creating a vase shape.
- Cut all canes to white or pale green pith (like the color of the inside of a green apple). Any brown coloration in the pith indicates a dead or dying cane, in which case the cane should be pruned to a lower bud eye, clear to the crown if necessary, in order to find live pith.
- Cut approximately 1/4 to 1/2 inch above a bud, on a downward slant, (45 degrees) away from the bud. Cut to an outside bud to make the plants grow

wider. Cut to an inside bud for more upright growth on a plant that has a tendency to sprawl.

- Use sharp tools for cutting. Use a keyhole saw or lopper to cut thick, woody, old canes.
- Select from 3 to 6 strong basal shoots from previous year's growth. Remove all other growth. Then prune those canes left.
- After making cuts, it is suggested to seal the ends of the cuts to prevent the entry of cane borers. White glue works well.
- If roses are grafted and there is sucker growth, remove it. The best way is to dig down to the root where the sucker is originating and tear it off where it emerges. Cutting suckers off only encourages regrowth of several suckers where there once was one.
- Accomplish as many chores as possible just after pruning before the bushes have sprouted. Remove mulch from the bud union, weed, and clean up the rose garden. This prevents breaking off the new shoots when doing these things later.

Pruning Variety of Roses

- Use pruning techniques above for Hybrid Teas, Floribunda and Grandiflora Roses.
- For Shrub roses cut back 1/3 of plant and prune out any dead or diseased canes.
- For Old roses that bloom only once, cut back 1/2 to 1/3 its size, right after blooming.
- Climbers need little or no pruning the first two years. Many of the older climbing varieties tend to bloom on second-year canes. If it has been pruned back each year like hybrid teas and other shrub roses then bloom production will be minimal. Plan on pruning climbing roses every three or four years. At this time, remove small, twiggy canes and old, woody, less vigorous canes at the base of the plant in favor of the young, vigorous canes that are long and flexible. These can then be trained onto or through the structure provided. Bend the canes and you will get new growth sprouts along their length. These are flowering shoots called laterals. Cut these shoots to about two to three buds and they will flower abundantly.

Deadheading

Dead-heading is the removal of faded flowers before they can develop seed. Dead-heading is a form of summer or day-to-day pruning. The standard recommendation is to cut the flower stem back to an outward-facing bud above a five-leaflet or seven-leaflet leaf. With rugosa and other shrub roses where hips are a part of the display, you may not want to prune off the old flowers. In this case, simply clean the spent blooms away with your hand, leaving the hips. Flowers should not be cut after August to allow the plant to begin hardening off for the winter. a problem.

Pest and Diseases

- Planting a rose in good soil with plenty of sunshine, air circulation and good sanitation are your first and most important defense against insect and disease problems. Mildew and blackspot are the two most troublesome problems but with a little effort can be easily controlled. There are many products out on the market, both organic and synthetic that can be used to prevent and control insect and diseases.
- Plant disease resistant varieties. Remember, however, in the Northwest, these roses can still have some problems just because we have warm days and cool nights, perfect conditions for spores to grow.
- Use beneficial insects – the “good bugs” that feed on the bugs that bother your roses.
- Don’t overhead water. Wet foliage promotes diseases. Use drip systems or soaker hoses, if possible.
- Use a combination horticultural oil and dormant spray once a year in the winter. This spraying smothers insect eggs and kills some disease organisms before they become a problem.