

# The Rookie Rosarian

By Bob Martin  
[petrose@aol.com](mailto:petrose@aol.com)



## Bud, Bloom & Beyond

April is a wonderful month for roses. It brings the spring bloom that is always the best of the year. By now your garden is showing a little color and the bushes are full of buds. By the middle of the month your bushes will be in full bloom. It is a time to enjoy the fruits of your labors. But, as always with roses, there are more things to do.

### Be Gentle with a Maiden Bush

A rose bush that you planted bare root in January is a maiden bush. True, it was likely a two-year field grown bush when planted, but any bush that is less than three years old should be treated as a maiden. And a maiden bush should be treated gently. Growth begets growth and a rose builds on itself in geometric proportions; particularly in its early development. The removal of new growth from a maiden bush carries a heavy cost in its future development. The guiding principle in dealing with the blooms and foliage of a maiden bush should therefore be one of caution and the resolution of doubts in favor of preserving the bush. Build your bush and God will put flowers on top. Do not cut long stems and be sure to preserve as many of the leaves as possible. The leaves are the solar panels that are essential to the energy of the bush. This is not to say that you should do nothing, as I explain below. But keep in mind the primary rule: "Be gentle with a maiden bush."

### Disbuds for You

You should have many developing buds in your garden. As the buds develop you will notice there are very few varieties that produce a single bud at the end of a developing long stem. Instead, there is typically a large central bud with several smaller

buds on the side. It is in the nature of the rose to produce many buds. The largest one, at the end of the stem, is called the terminal bud. The others, growing typically from one or more leaf axils near the top, are called side buds. The removal of either the terminal bud or the side buds is called "disbudding" and can contribute to a more beautiful display of blooms.

You could, if you like, simply let each of the buds develop on their own and this attitude is just fine with a maiden bush. But if you elect this approach, you can expect to get a single modest sized bloom at the end of the stem surrounded by some side buds. Later as the first bloom fades the side buds are likely to produce smaller blooms on very short stems. If, however, you gently remove the side buds with your finger before the terminal bud blooms, you will concentrate the growth energy of the bush into the one bloom and produce longer stems and bigger blooms. The earlier this is done, the better the result will be.

If the side buds are very vigorous, or the rose is one that naturally blooms in clusters such as a floribunda or shrub, it is better to remove the terminal bloom. This will concentrate all of the energy of the rose into the side buds and the result will be a very attractive spray of multiple blooms. For garden effect, this is the best approach. It is also a good means of encouraging lateral stem and foliage growth in your maiden rose.

### Making Cut Blooms Last

Do not let my admonition to be gentle with the maiden bush discourage you from cutting some blooms. Cut roses are a great joy in the house, the office or as gifts. As I describe below, you will have to cut off the bloom at some time or another in any event so feel free to do so as the blooms achieves its peak. But as I have said, be gentle.

The place to cut a rose is at the point just above a five-leaflet leaf. There in the leaf axil you will find a bud eye, which is the point at which the new stem growth will emerge. You may have heard about cutting at the second five-leaflet leaf, but this rule is of

more application to established roses. For a maiden rose it is better to cut to the first well-established five-leaflet leaf. The result will be a bloom with a short stem. But this is the way of the maiden rose. Enjoy what you get; next year the stems will be longer. For this year, it is better to learn some techniques for making your cut blooms last.

Cut the bloom carefully and take it to a preparation area. Despite what you may have heard, there is no need to carry it in water or to immediately recut the stem under water. Just don't leave it out of water for too long.

If you have room, give the stem and foliage a bath by immersing the rose up to its neck in slightly warm water. Adding a little vinegar to the water will acidify it and help the rose to take up water. It is also nice to wipe off the surface of the leaves to remove dirt, bird droppings, and spray residue; the effect will be much more attractive.

After cleaning, put the rose in a container of clear, slightly warm water to which you have added some vinegar to lower the pH. Then put your rose in a place out of the sunlight, in a cool well-ventilated place, and allow it to repose for about an hour. The purpose of this exercise is to permit the rose to become fully hydrated; i.e. filled with water.

After the roses have reposed you can arrange them in a container of cool water to which you have added a commercial floral preservative such as Floralife or Oasis. These preservatives typically have a nutrient (usually some form of sugar), an acidifying agent and a bactericide. You will find yourself pleasantly surprised by how much longer the cut roses will last when prepared in this fashion.

### Deadheading and Staking

By the end of the month the spring bloom will be petering out as the bushes regroup to prepare for the late spring bloom that will occur in the early part of June. I'll give you more

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information next month on preparing for the second bloom cycle; for now the emphasis is on deadheading and staking your roses.

Deadheading is the process of removing spent blooms. You could cut the bloom as it begins to fade down to a five-leaflet leaf as I describe above. However, with a maiden bush it is better yet to leave the bloom until the petals begin to fall and new growth is evident down the stem. This will guide you in where to cut the spent bloom. Cut the bloom at the point above the first vigorous new growth you see; this will often be at or very near the foliage just below the bloom head. Spring growth can be very vigorous and hopefully you will have been re-

warded in your effort by several long stems. Such stems can, however, make a bush top-heavy and drag the canes down. In extreme cases, I have even seen the bush fall over of its own accord.

The solution to this problem is to stake your roses. Get a supply of six-foot stakes from your local nursery; I prefer the aluminum stakes ribbed with a green rubbery plastic. Drive the stake firmly into the ground next to your vigorous stems and tie the stems to the stake with green garden tape. This will keep the bush upright and the growth going up. I find that one stake will do for the typical large rose.

### **Visit Other Roses**

April, as I have said, is a wonderful month for roses and your garden is

not the only one in bloom. The local gardens will also be in full bloom so this is a great time to take a look at other roses that you might consider for your own garden. Some of our members have open gardens; others do not mind a visit. Also the rose show season begins in Mid-April with the District Convention in Tucson, followed by the Pacific Rose Society Show at the Los Angeles Arboretum the following week, and the California Coastal show on May 1. Rose shows present further opportunities to learn more about roses and visitors are always welcome. Perhaps I will see you there and you can tell me how your roses are doing. I'll bet they are doing great.

