

Planting Bare Root Roses

By Dona English, ARS Consulting Rosarian Mesa-East Valley Rose Society

January is the time to plant bare root roses and if outside temperatures are carefully watched, until as late as mid-February.

Upon receipt of your bare root roses, you should take a 32 gallon trash can or other large container and fill it nearly to the top with water. Add a tablespoon of SuperThrive, which contains a variety of nutrients that include growth and rooting hormones. Adding a small amount of Clorox will help keep bacteria down. Then remove the bare root rose(s) from their package and place them in the trash can with the water covering them if possible. You can get six or eight roses in a trash can; just be careful when shoving them in that you are not breaking canes and roots.

The roses should be kept in the water for a minimum of 24 hours and ideally 48 to 72 hours. I have kept them this way in the shade for up to a week. You should note from this advice that to try to buy roses at the local nursery and plant them the same weekend, they need to be purchased early! Mail order roses generally arrive midweek and should be promptly removed from their packages and put in water. Mail order roses tend to be more dried out from their travels so they should get at least 48 hours in the water.

The first thing to do is dig a hole. "How big?" you ask. Roughly 24" wide and 18-24" deep. The objective is to have a hole that is large enough to accommodate the root system without having to bend the roots or trim them. There are occasional long heavy roots that may need to be trimmed but this is unusual; preservation of the root system is your objective. Drainage should be checked as well, by half filling the hole with water and making sure it drains within one hour.

The next thing to do is to select and prepare a planting mix. Our soil is heavy clay in most parts of the valley. Unless your soil is unusually good, discard all to half the soil from the hole and plant using only a planting mix. In selecting a planting mix you want a combination that will hold water but also allow for drainage and air spaces. Peat moss holds water, as does clay; perlite (soil pumice) and sand provide for drainage and air spaces. (Do not use a planting mix in a clay soil that contains vermiculite since vermiculite is also a clay and the combination can be used to make bricks!) A suggested blend is ½ soil or soil blend, 10%-15% peat moss and 1/4-1/3 mulch. One other critical ingredient that should be blended in the mixture is one cup of Dispersul or Tiger Sulfur with Iron. (Sulfur will not travel down to a root system if applied at a later time.) Perlite or soil pumice will also aid in keeping soil from compacting, especially when planting in pots.

Put some of the planting mix at the bottom of the hole. Add one cup of Triple Super Phosphate, which is put in the hole in piles or mounds. Do not mix it in the soil or just scatter it around because it will bond with the soil and not be available to the roots. Then cover it with more potting mix and build a mound in the center of the hole.

Remove the rose bush from the water. Examine the root system and cut off any broken roots. Then examine the canes. Remove obviously twiggy growth and any broken canes. Hopefully you'll have remaining the three good canes a #1 rose is supposed to have. Examine each cane to find an outward facing bud eye or ribbed growth area and cut just above it at a 45° angle with the angle away from the bud eye.

Set the rose on the mound and determine where the bud union is in relationship to the surface of the ground. (The bud union is the big knob where the canes are attached to the rootstock.) Laying a yardstick or other straight edge at the level of the hole will help with this. You will want the bud union to be about an inch above the ground's surface. Since a rose will settle, it is best to start the bud union about two inches above the surface of the ground. Build up the mound with additional soil until the rose is at the right level. The roots should then be spread around the edge of the mound and not folded back.

Next fill in the hole with your soil and firm it with your hands. (Do not ever use your feet to firm soil around a new rose.) Fill the planted hole with water (the water from your trash can will do) and allow to drain; this will cause the soil to settle. Add additional soil to complete the hole and then add mulch until you have built a mound that covers the bud union and goes up the canes. Gently water the rose with a water wand but be careful not to wash the soil off the bud union. This pile of mulch will keep the canes from drying out and allow the new growth to emerge more successfully. If canes are very dry or growth is slow in coming, the mulch can be contained with a paper bag placed around the canes to a depth of about 8".

Thereafter keep the mounded mulch moist and water regularly. After two to three weeks when new growth emerges you can begin to slowly wash the mound of mulch off the bud union. There is no reason to be in a hurry about this and it will happen in time anyway. Your roses will be off to a great start and you can go on to your Spring feeding and care program!

Continue to provide the proper care by following the instructions in our monthly newsletter or by visiting our website at:

www.roses4az-mevrs.org