

The Rookie Rosarian

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The Second Bloom

Your wonderful first bloom cycle is drawing to a close and you are encouraged by how well your roses are doing. But this is only the beginning for in Southern California the first spring bloom cycle is followed in but six weeks or so by an excellent second bloom cycle. This second bloom cycle typically occurs in the first to second week of June depending on the amount of the usual "June Gloom" weather we experience.

Complete Deadheading

Since you have been faithfully following my advice (haven't you?) the roses have been deadheaded carefully all through the first bloom cycle. They haven't? Well, okay, there have been a lot of blooms and you've fallen a little behind. So now's the time to catch up; in fact you can now deadhead to the second five leaflet leaf down from the spent bloom since the growth is getting on nicely. Better yet look for the new growth out of the lowers leaf axils and cut to that new growth.

This is also the time that you should get rid of all of your blind shoots. Blind shoots are stems that have failed to produce a flower; instead they often produce leafy growth at the end called "poodle growth". If the stem hasn't produced a flower it isn't going to do so, so imagine that it did and simply deadhead the imaginary bloom. You can even imagine that it won queen of show in another dimension if you are really into fantasy.

Watch for Basal Growth

This is the time of the year when you will get the most basal growth from your bushes. Basal growth is strong new growth from near and above the bud union. A strong new cane from this area is referred to as a basal break and is to be encouraged since

these will be the strong new canes of your rose bush. So look for this growth and encourage it by making room for it to come through. Also avoid stepping on it or dragging your garden hose around it so as to break it off. And, as it gets bigger and stronger, stake it up so that it will grow straight and tall. I like to give extra water to plants with strong basal growth on the theory that the growth will need it.

Increase Staking

The need for staking your rose bushes will greatly increase during the second cycle, so be alert to this. As I have said, be sure to stake strong new growth, particularly growth that seems destined to making a candleabra, which is an explosion of bloom at the top that matches the stem. Tall sprays will also have appeared late in the first bloom cycle and it is essential that you stake these as well. If this sounds like you are destined to have a stake at each rose and a lot of growth tied up with green garden tape, it is. And that is exactly how my garden is beginning to look.

Increase Water

The three most important factors in growing roses are water, water and water. As the weather warms it will become necessary to increase your watering to three to four times a week. Container roses will require an extra day a week. Summer is not that far away and the strong growth you will continue to experience before then will require extra watering.

Along this line, it is a good time to take a good look at the level of mulch around your roses. Mulch conserves water and feeds the soil. The mulch applied after winter pruning may still be in good order, but if it is looking a little thin, an addition may be in order.

This is also the time to begin regular water wanding of your bushes. Roses like to be showered - particularly as the weather warms. Wash off the undersides of your leaves at least once a week and while you are at it, come down with the water wand over the top of the foliage to wash off dirt, pests and powdery mildew spores.

Contrary to popular belief, powdery mildew abhors overhead watering and it is now hot enough to have little concern about the water-borne fungus diseases. It is, however, a good idea to leave enough time in the day for the water to dry off before nightfall.

Pests of the Season

Aphids continue to be a nuisance through the second bloom cycle so you should continue the control measures you have already adopted. In addition, the second cycle normally brings an increase in thrips. However, if your garden is like mine, they have already been there for weeks. These are those tiny insects you find in the blooms themselves, particularly in white roses. I'd like to be able to give you a sure fire solution to the problem of thrips, but there is none. Your control measures for aphids should provide some relief but mostly you will have to grin and bear them.

As the weather heats up you should be alert to the arrival of spider mites. These are tiny arachnids that congregate on the underside of your leaves, typically starting at the bottom of your plant, and suck the moisture from them. Yellow leaves at the bottom of the plant should be examined regularly on their reverse sides for the tell-tale salt and pepper look and fine webbing that is their mark. At this time of year the water wanding of the undersides of the leaves will usually provide adequate control.

If you have been plagued by rust, the warmer days will soon do it in for good. Powdery mildew will, however, continue to be a major disease problem through to the second cycle. So continue to be vigilant with your control measures until summer.

Summertime Soon

"Until summer", I say - yes, summer is not far away. But for now, the second cycle is on the horizon and roses in June are most beautiful. We'll talk about summer then.