

Rose Care for February

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Spring Pruning – There's still time to prune, but try to finish by the middle of the month. Prune back your roses to about 1/2 - 2/3 of their current height. If plants are five feet tall, cut them back to 2½ - 3 feet. One more time: Cut out all spindly, crossing and dead wood, which will help open up the center of the plant to let the sun get down to the bud union. Dead canes should be removed *at the bud union* to open up room for new basal breaks. (Don't leave stubs!) Strip off all leaves and throw them away. Do not leave cuttings as part of the mulch, as the old leaves may contain disease spores and over wintering insects. You should end up with from three to eight upright canes for hybrid teas, more for floribundas, OGRs and shrubs. You may have more canes if you are growing roses on 'Fortuniana' rootstock. OGRs can be shaped to keep them in bounds at least the first two to three years, then thinned as necessary.

Another thought on late pruning: go through your garden and at least prune perhaps half of each bush, preferably on the west side of the bush. This is better than not getting to them at all. Then go back through and prune the other side of the bush. This also serves to extend and stagger your bloom time. (This is the reverse of what we sometimes do in the fall.) It will be especially more noticeable if we have an unusually warm spring.

After Pruning – Spray the soil with Orthene, Diazinon or Merit to kill insects, especially thrips that are over wintering below the soil surface. Spray the canes with a good fungicide, such as Funginex, which is a mildew *preventative*. These are preventative measures that will save much work later on. If mildew does get established, the best new irradicant on the market by far is Compass, available on Rosemania.com. (Yes, it's pricey, but worth it! So find a buddy or two to share it with...)

Fertilizer – If you use good organic fertilizers like alfalfa pellets and/or Miller's Rose Food (which has replaced Hickman's), they may be applied after pruning on established bushes. In our gardens, we apply 2 cups Miller's plus 1 cup alfalfa pellets per large rose bush, grown in soil; 1 cup Hickman's plus ½ cup alfalfa meal per miniature rose bush grown in the soil. For roses grown in pots, use ½ the above rate for standard roses or miniatures. When fertilizing, water thoroughly before application and again afterwards to prevent root burn. Epsom salts can be applied this month or early March, at a rate of ½ cup per large bush. The magnesium will promote basal breaks. A second application comes in early April or about six weeks after the first.

Planting – Bare root roses may still be planted into February, however few are now available locally. Be sure to hydrate them well, fully immersing them in water for *at least* 24 hrs, even up to a week or two if out of the sun. Add some Superthrive to the water to strengthen them prior to planting. If we have unusual heat, it is more important than ever to keep the canes moist when trying to get them to bud out. Try covering them with wet mulch or peat moss, held around the canes by a bottomless brown grocery sack. Continue to keep the mulch wet until growth has started, then gradually wash it away! This really works and makes a big difference in how well the buds begin to grow.

This is also a good time to transplant. Roses transplant well when care is given to keeping the root ball intact and to not letting the roots dry out. Plants can be placed in a kitchen or grocery garbage bag to keep the moisture in for a short time or in a pot for longer holding. Continue to water! The tops should be pruned back in proportion to the root system.

Potted roses may still be planted through March and very early April. Berridge Nursery in Phoenix will start selling its *new* stock of potted roses in early March, but has some of last years pots out now. Harpers, Bakers, Jack's and A & P Nurseries have potted roses, with the latter carrying an especially nice supply of tree roses.

When planting any roses, be sure to check for good drainage by filling the hole and making sure the water soaks down within half a day. Mix up to 50% perlite into your planting mix to keep it loose and aerated. Add a cup of Dispersal to the hole to help break down tight, clay soils. When adding nutrients to the hole remember NOT to mix

Triple Super Phosphate in with the soil mix. Place it in clumps around the perimeter of the hole (on the sides of the mound for bare root), where the roots will reach it. Mixing it in the soil allows it to bond with the soil and so becomes much less available to the plant.

As roses start to leaf out, irrigation should average once a week early in the month and twice a week by month's end. If you drip irrigate, set the flow at three to four gallons of water per bush. If you flood irrigate, water deeply once a week throughout the month. Always have a wide basin around the base of the bush to keep the water from running off. If you are adding new watering systems, talk with LeRoy Brady or me about in-line drip hose, such as Netafim, which is used on Arizona highway landscaping.

Finally, don't forget to apply a 3-4" layer of forest mulch or pine needles around the roses and throughout your beds. It will help hold the moisture in, prevent weeds and keep beds cooler as it warms up.

For additional information, visit one of our many pruning and planting demonstrations or articles on our web site:

www.roses4az-mevrs.org

