

THINGS TO DO IN MARCH

By now those lifeless looking sticks called "bare root roses" you planted in January or February should have started to put out healthy new growth to hold up the first beautiful blooms of the new season. Those roses from previous years, pruned and old foliage removed, should be putting out new canes as well. New bushes that do not show growth should be covered with wet forest mulch, which can be held around the canes by a plastic or paper grocery bag. Keep it wet to see if it is not too late for the buds to sprout out. If there is no growth in a week to ten days, you might want to consider replacing it with a potted rose.

Irrigation: Deep water once a week with flood irrigation. If you drip irrigate, do so two to three times per week. The amount of water applied should be 3 to 4 gallons of water each drip irrigation cycle. Use this time to make sure all drip heads are clear and have the proper flow before the plants fill in with new growth. It is a good time to consider using adjustable drip head, "shrubblers", which allow you to adjust for the individual size rose, the water pressure and the porosity of the soil.

Fertilizer: Now is the time to push growth to have the best and biggest blooms for April, especially if you plan to exhibit in our spring rose shows. Use a liquid fertilizer early in the month, such as MiracleGro or Magnum Grow. Fish emulsion used later in the month, when buds are about pea-sized, will help add color to the blooms. We like Safer brand fish emulsion as it has less oil content and smells for a very short time. Use 1 Tablespoon per gallon of water. Amount applied for roses in the ground: 1½ gallons – hybrid teas & grandifloras; 1gallon - floribundas; ½ - gallon miniatures. Potted roses should be given ½ this rate every 10 to 14 days. Note: If this sounds too complicated, consider a good inorganic granular fertilizer, like Organo Super Rose Food or Bandini Rose Food, at the rate of 1 cup per large bush and ½ cup per small bush. Use ½ this rate for potted roses and apply once each month.

Insects: Watch for aphids this month. Either hose them off the bush with water 2-3 times per week or use a good insecticide like Orthene or Fertilome Systemic Insecticide at the labeled rate. These products will also help keep down the population of thrips, which do their damage to the blooms before they even open. Thrips are so small they can hardly be seen and tend to be more attracted to light colored blooms. It is effective to use a handheld spray bottle of insecticide and to spray each bud directly, rather than spray the whole plant. This makes the most difference in the quality of the blooms by eliminating unsightly, brown damage to the petals.

Diseases: You should continue to spray at regular intervals for powdery mildew, using a good fungicide to prevent mildew from taking hold. These include Funginex and Banner Maxx, alternating products to prevent insects from becoming resistant. Powdery mildew looks like a white, dusty film on the leaves, especially on new growth, and causes the edges to curl somewhat. In Arizona, we very rarely see black spot or downy mildew, which is a great trade off for having to water more than other parts of the country!

Finally, don't forget to mulch! This is one of the best investments in fighting our hot summers and it is a lot easier to do it this time of year. Use 3-4" of a good forest mulch, spreading it evenly around the full area of your beds. This will help keep soil temperatures lower, hold in moisture and helps prevent weeds as well. Another alternative is using pine needles, such as those from White Mountain Pine Needles, carried by A & P Nurseries. In addition to the above benefits, as the pine needles break down, they help to correct our alkaline soil, making it slightly more acidic. They also break down more slowly than forest mulch and do not move when using flood irrigation.