

Rose Care For September

By Dona English and Mike Jepsen

It is finally time to think about fall pruning! The nights are just starting to cool down and with this alone you should see an improvement in your plants. The days will start to cool a little, but not in a consistent amount so don't get started too soon or you will see heat stress. Mike Jepsen and Steve Sheard are among the few die-hard exhibitors who start this early with selected pruning because they show roses at the Arizona State Fair in mid-October. There is little competition and they generally sweeps the shows, winning the cash prizes given there. So if you brave the crowds, don't forget to visit the Horticulture area and see the first roses of fall!

For the rest of us, pruning should start around the third or fourth week of the month. You can start earlier than that with general cleanup. Get rid of the spurge and grass that sneaked in while you were inside enjoying your air conditioning or being a "Zonie" in San Diego. During the summer, as growth slows and is weaker, the bushes form "candelabras" or a multiple of many thin stems at the top of the bush. We will be removing about 1/4 to 1/3 of the bush to get below these candelabras, along with opening up room for the wonderful growth that will last until the new year. This is, in fact, some of the best growth of the year.

Start by cutting out dead canes, spindly stems, crossing stems and blind shoots. The objective is to cut back to a pencil size stem, particularly for hybrid teas, which is what is needed to support a good bloom. Cut below the candelabra type growth to 1/4" above a bud eye that will direct the next cane to the outside of the bush. If the bush has become too wide or is near a wall, select a bud eye pointing to the preferred direction. Generally speaking, the rose plant above the ground matches the root system below the ground (in mass.) Assuming a plant is established, little or too light pruning in fall will result in lots of smallish flowers on short stems, because the bush is already maxed out to the size of the root system. When finished, be sure to clean up cuttings, dead leaves and any other debris. If mulch has worn away, it should be refreshed.

Fertilization will now depend on what you did during the summer. It should be about four to six weeks since you last fed your roses or wait until it has been. Then you can use a time release product like Organo or organic fertilizer like Hickman's Rose Food, following the directions for the product. It is still easy to burn the plants, especially new growth, in this heat. Note: Go 1/2 this rate for potted roses. Be sure to water before and after fertilization! In October, we will use other more aggressive fertilization when the temperatures have dropped for the season.

Continue hosing off your bushes, but do so only in the early morning hours for the rest of the season. If you hose off late in the day, you may create an environment conducive to powdery mildew. Spray with a good fungicide to prevent disease from starting. Continue with your summer irrigation schedule.

When you're finished, don't forget to go through the new catalogs or online editions to start planning for your next new roses!