

much different looking than the rest of the plant. You should trim them off as close to the base as possible.

In areas with no frost during winter you can plant the knot an inch or so above the soil line. In colder climates, the bulge should be 2 inches below grade, so the soil offers some protection from the cold.

Once the plant is positioned you can begin to back fill with soil, I use the soil I dug out of the hole, combined with potting soil and compost. The exact proportions depend on your soil type. If you have lots of clay, don't use too much of it, because the clay holds moisture. If not, just use the soil you have and the amendments I suggested will make up for most deficiencies.

I add in a handful of organic rose and plant food and some alfalfa, which is really slow release fertilizer. Without going into, too much detail I should offer a few words about the numbers on the fertilizer bag. The numbers refer to the proportion of nitrogen, phosphate and potash which supply nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium to the plant.

Many manuals recommend that you have your soil tested before you start a garden to find out exactly what the ground contains. This is a great idea but can take time and the exact makeup may change from one part of the garden to another. That's why with roses, I dig a large enough hole to make my own soil mixture.

Simplifying the number you need to know: the first number is for the leaves, the second number is for the roots and flowers and the third is for disease resistance, overall hardiness and general health.

The fertilizer I use is 4-6-2 which means it promotes healthy leaves and blooms – which is what you want in a rose or flower food. The truth is, you could use a 10-10-10 fertilizer, which is what many centers use for grass, and the plant would still be fine, but probably with fewer blooms.

I use the same organic 4-6-2 fertilizer about every three weeks during the growing season. I just throw a small handful at the base of each plant and let the water carry the nutrients into the soil. I stop applying anything when the weather starts to get colder and the days get shorter. The plants need a rest by then and trying to force them into more blooms is just cruel.

So, if I remember, you've been on your knees holding on to the plant for about 30 minutes as you read all this. Start backfilling making sure that the space under the plant is filled with soil. Some gardeners advise making a small hill in the middle of the hole, so that the rose will be supported. The last thing you want is a fully grown plant that sinks under it's own weight and breaks off its own roots.

Once the hole is filled I recommend leaving a small depression to hold water. Actually, in my garden I use crescent shaped tree rings to make a barrier on the down-hill side of my plants. My yard is on a gentle slope so the ring sections work well and prevent erosion during the rainy season.

Water well after planting. Water for a minute or two, let the water drain and water again. After planting I water every day for a week, and then every two or three days and then just normally with all my other roses. By two or three weeks you should be seeing new growth confirming that the rose is pretty happy.

Assuming the plant has enough fertilizer, and sun you might even start to see some buds in about a month.

Regular Care:

OK, so you have a few roses, they did well the first year and you're feeling pretty good. Now comes the

harder part: how do you make sure the second act is as good as the first.

In northern California regular rose care starts in January, when it's time to trim. Lots of folks (like me) actually plan their New Year's Day activity around this annual chore, although any time before the end of February is fine.

The first thing you need to know is, that you don't even need to do any trimming. The roses will keep growing and blooming regardless.

But there are other reasons cutting back a rose bush is a good idea. If you understand the growing habits of your plant, it gives you a chance to maximize the quality of the blooms by limiting the number of canes (branches). It also gives you a chance to shape the plant, and if you have over 100 roses in a small yard, like I do, you can keep each one compact and happy.

Additionally, you can keep the plants healthier by thinning unneeded growth that inhibits airflow and can lead to disease.

Equipment:

To start, make sure you have the right tools. Hand clippers with sharp blades are a necessity. A friend gave me a pair on gloves with extended sleeves that cover my hand and arms up to the elbows. After using them this year, I don't know how I managed without them. (thank you Julie) I can hold on to cut canes without worrying about thorns, and I can reach inside a plant to awkward locations without worrying about a scratch from my wrist to my elbow.

Finally, if you're new to the rose trimming business bring a #2 pencil.

No, you're not going to write anything down, but the pencil is your guide to which branch to cut. In most cases, when you have finished trimming every branch left will be at least as thick as that #2 pencil in your pocket.

You want branches big enough to support a blom, plus you don't want any small suckers that produce foliage but no flowers. One piece of advice: be ruthless, the plant will survive.

Just make sure you leave at least one joint or eye on the remaining branch. That's where the new growth will start, so be aware of the shape you are creating. Ideally the eye should face out from the center of the plant, so interior will stay open and allow plenty of air flow which can help prevent disease. At my home in the Berkeley Hills we get plenty of fog during the summer so keeping plants open is crucial to preventing rust, black spot and a host of other problems.

Very often you have a choice about where on a large branch to cut. I always favor the more aggressive trim leaving just a single eye for new growth. It keeps the plant compact and focuses the growth.

As always there are exceptions to the #2 pencil rule. For example, landscape or bush roses don't have many branches wider than a pencil, so if you do trim back to the standard size you'll be forfeiting a year of flowers as new small branches grow in. I just trim these roses back by about a third to shape.

Additionally there are some older roses which don't have thick branches. For example, I have a rose named for British horticulturist Gertrude Jekyll. I love the rose, but it is not prolific and the biggest branch is barely pencil size, so I just look for the largest braches I can find and trim way.

There are a few other special cases, particularly with large plants such as ‘Fame’ or ‘About Face’ which have numerous large canes. But if you just consider plant size and shape you should be successful.

Remember, despite their reputation, roses are pretty tough.

One other note, make sure you trim out any dead growth. The dead wood is unattractive plus, when a dead branch is left intact, and is available to rub against a healthy branch the healthier limb will wind up wearing away like an open sore, just looking for disease.

I would also note that trimming back roses early in the season is good practice for later in the year when old blooms need to be removed. Again you want to cut back to a branch that can support new growth. While your trimming might not be as severe, you still want to cut back to a leaf with five petals on it, at a joint facing away from the center.

For some roses this can mean taking out a rather substantial branch, for others it might mean a cut just below the flower you are removing. It can be confusing because it varies with the habit of each rose. Trust me, you will learn from your mistakes – every rose “expert” does. Remember an expert is just someone who has made a lot of mistakes.

OK, now you’ve got everything trimmed back it’s time to make sure your roses get off to a good start as the days get longer and the temperatures rise. This is also the best time to transplant and reorganize the rose garden. I just fenced in my front yard so after I pruned back the roses, I moved a few plants out there. Just make sure you dig up as much of the root ball as you can, trying to keep as many small delicate roots intact. As long as you move the plant when it’s dormant, new roots will grow. You can move roses mid-season, but they have a much tougher time recovering.

Plant at the same height as the original rose, put some fertilizer in the bottom of the hole and come spring you should see new growth. It may take a season to see full growth, but they will be fine.

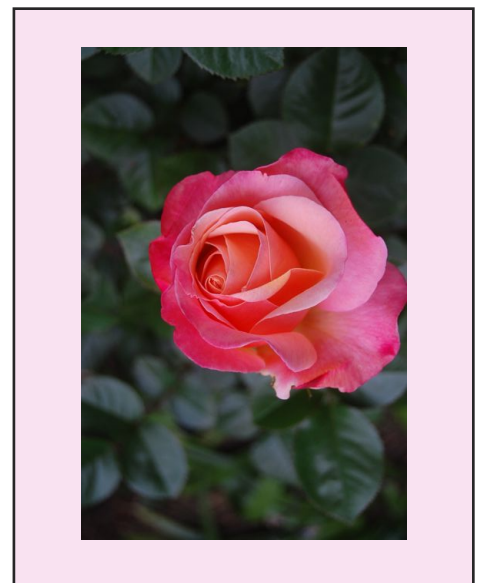
For the rest of the roses I get ready for the season by weeding, removing as many dead leaves as possible and adding fertilizer. There should not be any leaves on the rose plant, once it’s trimmed, and old and decaying leaves just carry disease from season to season.

I use some rose and flower, organic fertilizer throwing a handful at each plant. Then I add some alfalfa, which is essentially slow release fertilizer. Finally I spread compost, which I’ve been ‘creating’ all year, then add a layer of all-purpose garden soil.

Hopefully it will rain soon and we’ll be off to the races with blooms in time for Mother’s Day.

Disease:

Roses attract a variety of diseases. You can waste your time applying pesticides and all kinds of evil chemicals, but they will not stop the problem and will only pollute the groundwater. When I first started, I spent several years learning this.



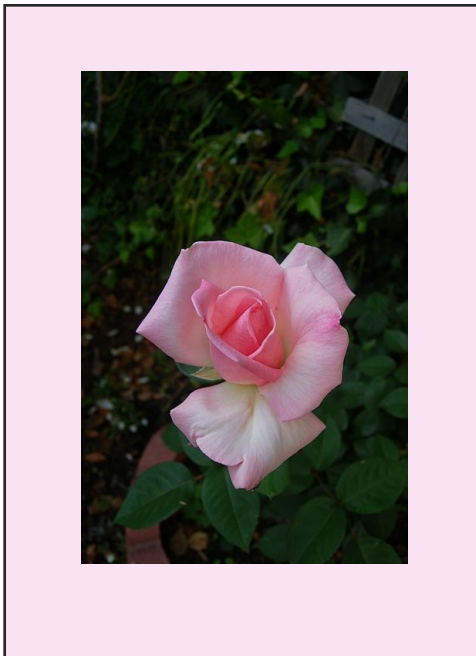
Colorific

Eventually I discovered that roses are pretty tough. They may get rust or black spot, which detracts from their beauty, but they will still bloom and thrive.

The easiest solution is to cut back the diseased part – often the whole plant - and just wait until the rose returns.

As I've noted, you can buy disease resistant varieties, but that's not really a guarantee. I have some roses (such as 'Moonstone') that gets rust every year. The flowers are still pretty and my wife loves them so I put it in a pot, try to keep it away from other plants and after the first bloom, when the rust appears, I cut it back, as if it were January. It seems to survive.

Keep in mind that many diseases can be spread by contact. So if you cut back a diseased plant, make sure you wash off your clippers before working on another rose. Black spot, another common problem, is not as insidious as rust, and will just discolor the leaves. The blooms will be fine.



Pink Promise

Stress is another cause of disease. In 2015 we had quite the drought in California – you may have heard about it. Trying to be a good citizen I cut back on water and fertilizer. Well, this just stressed out the plants and I had disease on plants that had never had problems in the past.

Also the plants reacted by dropping all their leaves. To conserve energy they just figured they would stop growing and wait until next year. As soon as I resumed my normal watering routine and gave the a boost of fertilizer the leaves returned and most of them looked as if nothing had happened.

But, it was clear they were not happy about the Governor's edict to cut back on water.

Speaking of water, I should note that there are number of theories about how much water roses need. In general, the faster they are growing the more water they need.

Some experts say that roses do best with a little water every day or so. But to do that you need either a lot of time or a well regulated drip irrigation system. I use soaker hoses in parts of my garden, but I admit I like watering by hand. I water most plants once a week, and those in pots every three days or so.

Hand watering takes time, but I find it relaxing and it gives me a chance to spot little problems before they get huge. I can see disease when it's just starting, I can see suckers (canes growing from below the joint) and I can tell what needs to be trimmed or where I made a mistake.

Plus the roses talk to me with their complaints. They explain what they need and whether they want to be moved next winter, or why they're having a bad year. I've has some roses who seem listless and perform poorly for a year or two and suddenly perk up and look spectacular. Who knows why, they're roses.

Death:

Rose plants die. Often there is nothing you can do except, mourn, dig up the plant and start over. Most of the time the plants will take all sort of abuse from branches broken by hoses to disease and deer. But they will come back.

Despite what some manuals says, you can plant a new rose where the old onne was. As long as there was not something in the soil, you can add more dirt and just start over. Keep in mind though, it is possible there was something about the location that may have killed the first plant. Maybe a tree growing nearby is creating more shade, or possibly an animal has been gnawing on the roots.

I have one plant which I admire just because it has been so stubborn. It was first challenged when a new fence post cut off most of it's roots,.

The next year I transplanted it to a very poor location (behind a larger rose) and it almost died but put out one lonely bloom. After two seasons I transplanted it to a pot, where it was just coming into full bloom when a deer managed to breach my defenses and ate every blossom. It is now, back to full bloom and living happily ever after. Stubborn doesn't begin to describe it.

Tags:

Rose sellers like to put a lot of information on tags, that they think you should know but really don't help the average gardener. Photos are a good example. I'm sure the rose you get will bear some resemblance to what's on the label, but the similarity is often pretty weak.

Remember the folks who write the tag, also create those colorful listings for real estate – or so it seems. I can't explain every term but just beware of terms like 'vigorous' or 'disease resistant.'

Vigorous can mean invasive and very few roses can resist a disease infestation, but at least resistance gives them a leg up.

Conclusions:

I hesitate to say that's everything you need to know about roses. Books have been written on the topic. But I hope I've taken some of the fear out of growing America's favorite flower and that next time you want to add some color to your life, you will consider a rose, - you won't be disappointed.



John F. Kennedy