

Pruning roses

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PRUNING ROSES

Valentine's Day is synonymous with roses. Mid to late February, in Zone 8, is the time to check your rose bushes for swollen buds. This marks the time "dormancy breaks" and it is time to prune. Pruning is one of the most important and necessary steps in growing roses. All roses benefit from some pruning.

WHY YOU SHOULD PRUNE ROSES AND WHAT TO PRUNE

Pruning keeps the plant healthy.

Remove dead, diseased, broken or weak canes as soon as they appear. When pruning, check that the stems show no signs of discoloration. The center of the canes should be white and plump. If they appear to be diseased, cut further down into the healthy stem. If no live buds remain, remove the entire cane.

Prune rose bushes to make them more open in the center. This allows sunlight inside the plant and increases air circulation to prevent diseases.

When ever two canes cross each other, prune one of them. Crossing canes rub against each other and cause damage and open wounds that diseases can enter.

When a choice must be made between two close growing canes, leave the newest and healthiest cane.

Remove sucker growth coming from below the bud union. Suckers can be from the root stock and a different rose variety. They will crowd out the desired variety.

Pruning promotes new growth and can encourage either more or larger blooms.

Hybrid teas, floribundas and grandifloras can be hard pruned. Cut all but 3 to 5 healthy, most vigorous canes down to 15 to 18 inches from the ground, or 24 to 30 inches for moderate pruning. Shrub roses, in general, should be reduced by 1/3 . Leave enough cane so you can prune off cold damage later in the spring.

Old Garden roses (roses introduced before 1867 from varieties that evolved from roses in a region near China, like the ones grandma had) do not need hard pruning like most modern roses. Hard pruning ruins their graceful shape and severely reduces their flowering . Remove no more than 1/3 of the bush and any old canes that are no longer productive.

You can prune roses to achieve a desired shape, size and usage.

Floribundas, shrub, and Knock Out roses used as low borders should be cut more severely, 15 to 18 inches from the ground.

Climbers should conform to the trellis or support they are trained on. Eliminate all but 5 or 6 strong canes about 6 feet in length. Climbers and old fashion roses that bloom only once should be pruned after flowering. They bloom on wood from the previous years growth. If you prune them in the spring they will not bloom.

Prune first year plants lightly to allow them to put more energy into establishing a strong root

system and to begin their desired shape.

The rose bush you received for Valentine's Day, either potted or bareroot, has already been pruned. Go ahead and plant them.

Ground cover roses, drifts and carpets, require very little pruning. Trimming will keep them vigorous. If you want them to sprawl, remove any vertical stems.

Miniatures can be pruned in mid March. Cut back canes to activate new growth and remove any winter damaged stems to maintain an appealing and healthy appearance. Depending on variety, they can be pruned to a height of 5 to 10 inches.

HOW TO PRUNE ROSES

These pruning techniques are appropriate for all roses.

You will need a sharp pruning shears and long handled loppers. Bypass pruners are best. Anvil pruners damage the stems by crushing them. A pruning saw will be helpful for any large, heavy and old stems.

Leather gloves that go up to your elbow will protect your hands and arms.

Dip your pruners periodically in a 70% alcohol solution to avoid spreading diseases from plant to plant.

Make pruning cuts above a leaf bud. Rose bushes send out new growth from the bud below the pruning cut. Try to cut above a bud facing out from the center of the plant. Make the cut 1/4 inch above the bud and angled at the same angle as the bud. Don't leave a stump and don't treat the cut with anything. The plant will heal itself better on its own.

Roses are a beautiful and fragrant addition to any garden. There is a rose for almost every situation. Pruning roses is a harbinger of spring. Prune now and enjoy your roses this summer through fall.

Come visit the Brunswick County Botanical Garden. It is a teaching garden in that we are striving to grow plants that do well in our area of Zone 8. It is a work in progress and we are proud of our efforts and encourage you to visit and ask questions.

LEARN MORE

For more information on pruning roses, visit <http://ces.ncsu.edu>, where you can post your question via the 'Ask an Expert' link, or contact your local Extension office. If you live in Pender County, call 259-1235. In New Hanover County call 798-7660. In Brunswick county call 253-2610.