

SO YOU WANT TO GROW ROSES

By: Ted Mills

Ten years have passed since I penned this article. It was written primarily to benefit the aspiring beginner in rose culture. We have seen many changes since that time in our world. Probably the most significant happened on 9/11. It was then that the USA took a changed perspective of the word, FREEDOM. RoseDoc makes this statement because America's outlook toward liberty has changed. No longer can we sit smug in our homes and not ever expect attack. It has been 233 years since the British were driven from our land. Years passed and no foreign power attacked our soil until that fateful day in 2001. Now we must be vigilant to the extent that foreign powers will not take away our freedom. Since we have just celebrated Independence Day, it is imperative that we categorize 9/11 as a cowardly act that must not be allowed to happen again.

Although not as important, it is fitting that rosarians review the changes that have gone on in the rose world. There are many. Many new rose specimens have entered the market although the mechanics of growing them has seen little change. It is true that of late we have seen a clamor for shrub-like bushes. The fact that specimens such as 'Knock Out' require little or no spraying makes them a popular entry into the rose kingdom. This treatise is basic instruction, but the turnover in rose society membership requires a simplistic instruction program.

RoseDoc is a firm advocate in keeping the hobby simple. Teaching presented in understandable terms allows the novice to grasp the rules with optimum ease. Leaving rose leaf pathology to the experts is the proper path of instruction. After all, learning to grow roses is the call of most rosarians. Let's review the roadmap to better roses.

First, establish a mental attitude that denotes a true love for the rose. Support this with the energy necessary to harvest award-winning specimens. Providing the rose bush with a "healthy" home is the next step after a positive attitude has been established. A site that provides at least six hours of sunlight is best. Proper drainage is also of great importance. A planting mix of 1/3 fertile top soil, 1/3 coarse creek sand, and 1/3 organics is the perfect residence for the bushes. Be sure that the rose bed is not near encroaching tree roots that rob the plants of nutrients. Select plants that are Grade 1 with at least three lively canes. Avoid paraffin-coated bushes. Finally, test the planting mix and see that it is a slightly acid product that shows a pH of between 6.2 and 6.8, with 6.5 being ideal.

Rose bushes are heavy feeders making it essential that these are frequently fertilized. It is better to feed frequently rather than gorge the plants on a

happenstance schedule. A combination of organic and inorganic food is the ideal method of feeding. Be sure and add compost to your rose bed. Micro-organisms are constantly devouring the vegetative organics requiring these be replaced frequently. Composting is nature's way of maintaining the food cycle of vegetation.

It is a known fact that disease spores and insects are lurking to feast on prized rose bushes. A well-planned spray schedule is a must. Never procrastinate in this duty. Establish a day for spraying which is weekly with few exceptions. Also, keep the rose beds hospital clean to prevent disease spores from residing on fallen leaves that may be contaminated.

Since rose bushes are really fruit trees, the plants try to go to fruit. By deadheading the spent blooms, the fruiting action is interrupted. A new cycle of blooms occurs and continues until frost or freeze enters the scene. Deadheading should be effected as soon as the blooms are spent.

When winter approaches, the crafty rosarian puts his prize bushes in a warm bedding operation. There are several ways to insulate rose plants for the winter chill. Simply mounding clean, fertile soil around the bud union to a height of 12 inches is correct action. Cover the mound with pine needles to prevent soil erosion due to rain.

When spring is approaching and the bushes are leaving dormancy, prune them in a major sense. This operation promotes vigorous new growth. Remember -- pruning high produces more blooms but does result in smaller blossoms. Pruning low ensures larger canes with larger blooms. It is a good idea to prune twiggy and unproductive growth all during the growing season. This allows proper air circulation for the plant, thereby helping to prevent disease and insect invasion through improved spray coverage. Contact a Consulting Rosarian for help since pruning methods are variable. It depends on whether the bush is hybrid tea, floribunda, shrub, or miniature.

Above all, keep the bush adequately watered. It is the most essential phase of growing roses. Six to ten gallons of water are needed each week. Failure to provide moisture spells doom for the bushes.

Happy Rose Growing!!!