

Now is the time for planting and pruning roses

by Grace C. Lockwood
Special

Now is the traditional time to plant roses. They should be planted while they are still dormant and the weather is not too hot to dry out the canes.

If you receive bare root roses from the nursery or mail order, soak the roots for a couple of hours in a pail of warm water. Prepare a hole larger than the root section; mix some compost or fertilizer in the bottom of the hole, making sure the fertilizer will not come into direct contact with the roots and pour in some water.

Plant so that the grafted union is approximately 1-2" below ground surface. Fill the hole halfway, packing the earth well around the roots and add some more water, allow to settle. Fill the hole and tamp the ground so that there is a shallow well around the plant and water will drain towards the plant. Plant roses in well-drained soil as they do not like wet feet. If hot, dry weather is expected (hah!), mulch the canes for the first few days to prevent the buds from drying out and withering.

When planting container roses, make sure the soil in the root ball has not compacted to such a degree that the roots cannot break through the ball. If this is the case, the plant may live for a couple of seasons, then die unexpectedly. When you dig the plant up, you will see that no new roots would have formed and the plant had gradually starved.

Before you buy any container plant, check the soil in the container to make sure it is loose and not a heavy clay. Take the plant out of the container and loosen the soil around the roots. Cut off any damaged roots and plant as above. Container grown roses do not have to be pruned or mulched however.

Pruning roses has often been a controversial issue between growers who like to prune severely and those who do not. In our area, winter usually takes care of most of the pruning needs by killing off everything above the snowline or the mulch. Roses should be pruned now, before they leaf out.

First prune away all winter-killed branches and canes back to healthy wood. Then stand back and

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take a look at the bush and consider the shape you would like. Cut out any weak stems and diseased sections showing up as black spots, blisters, cankers on branches and split wood. Cut out any branches growing through the centre of the plant, stick out beyond the overall shape of the plant and any that rub against each other. If possible cut back to just above an outward facing eye so the centre of the bush remains clear. This allows air to circulate through the bush and helps prevent fungal diseases from



taking hold.

Hybrid teas can be pruned back to one third of the branch length. If they are more severely pruned,

they will produce fewer but larger flowers. Foribundas and shrub roses can be pruned less severely, cutting back one third of the branch length. Shrub roses can be pruned just for shape as well. Old-fashioned roses should not be pruned at all except to remove dead or weak wood since they flower on old wood only. Climbing roses have different requirements, which I will discuss in another article.

Established roses can be fertilized and sprayed now as well. If

they haven't budded out yet, you can apply a combination dormant oil and sulphur spray according to directions. If they have leafed out, use the dormant oil at the lower concentration. Complete directions are on the box. A 10% bleach solution or an anti-transpirant like Safer's "Forevergreen" also make good fungicide sprays.

For further information on aspects raised in this column or just for general gardening tips, call Grace C. Lockwood at 873-7019.



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