

Dear John:

John Deere Answers Your Lawn and Garden Woes



Prime Time Roses

Dear John: I've seen the same horror show too many times — beautiful roses crushed in their prime by a villainous winter. How can I give my roses a happy ending?

Dear Thorny Dilemma: Turn the channel down on winter and switch stations to find a program that will protect your roses this year. After a few frosts, but before the ground freezes, place an 8 to 10 inch/20 to 25 cm mound of loose soil or mulch around the base of the roses. In addition to shading the soil from a repeated cycle of freeze and thaw, the mulch acts as a barrier to wind and cold.

If you're worried that winter's evil plot will thicken, use nylon collars. These provide more protection than mulch because the collars hold a larger amount of soil in place around the stem. The collars should be large enough to slip easily over the plants. Fill the collars with mulch and build up additional mulch around them.

Another option is to use styro-foam snow cones. These are more expensive than mulch or collars, but provide complete coverage and are reusable. The cones should have holes in the top for adequate ventilation.

Dear John: I'm all thumbs when it comes to fixing things.

How can I safely clean out a clogged discharge chute on my lawnmower?

Dear Tom Thumb: Before clearing a clog — or making any other repairs around the mower blade — stop the engine. Disconnect the spark plug wire on walk-behinds to be sure the engine won't restart if you accidentally turn the blade. And make sure to use a tool or stick to clear the clog — never use your fingers (or thumbs) to do the job.

Dear John: Should I fertilize in the fall? Or is it a waste of time since my lawn's growing season is almost over anyway?

Dear Fall Feeder: Contrary to popular belief, grass continues to grow all winter long, and fall is actually the most important time of the year to fertilize. A tremendous amount of root growth takes place during winter months; lawns need an ample supply of nitrogen to nourish and encourage this growth. A fall feeding also helps grass to "green up" quicker in the spring by storing nitrogen in the roots. Use a high-nitrogen fertilizer with a 3-1-2 ratio of nitrogen to phosphorus to potassium, or a ratio of 45-0-0, which is nitrogen-rich urea. And remember, apply no more than 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet/100 sq. m. of lawn at each feeding.

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Children registering and Nursery Schools or Day Care Centre must also be immunized.

If you have any questions or wish more information, please call the Thunder Bay District Health Unit Office at:

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