

HOW TO TAKE CARE OF ROSES

By Steven A. Frowine, The National Gardening Association

Roses have a reputation for being difficult to care for, but actually learning **how to take care of roses** is somewhat simple. The main components involved with caring for roses that you need to understand are: planting, watering, fertilizing, pruning, and winterizing. Simply put, with the correct amount of water and sunlight and a little bit of grooming, your roses should thrive. And remember, roses are resilient plants. So, if you occasionally forget or muff something, the plants are surprisingly forgiving.



Follow these basic rose care & maintenance steps:

- **Watering your roses regularly.** The rule of thumb for watering roses is to make sure roses get about 2 inches of water per week. Deep soakings are much better than frequent, shallow watering. Set the hose at the foot of the rose and let water trickle in. Or, if you have a big bed of roses or roses and companions, use a soaker hose or install an in-ground system.
- **Feed roses consistently before and throughout the blooming cycle and use fertilizer to support healthy growth.** Use an all-purpose garden fertilizer, because it has balanced amounts of N (nitrogen), P (phosphorus), and K (potassium). Fertilizers touted especially for roses — such as Rose Food — are fine but not mandatory. In spring, as the plant emerges from dormancy, you can water with a tablespoon of Epsom salt (magnesium sulfate) dissolved in a gallon of water to promote strong canes.

Always water before applying fertilizer so the plant is plumped up and under no stress.

GROOMING ROSES

- **Groom your roses to improve flowering and keep plants healthy:** Using sharp clippers, you can spruce up your rosebushes whenever something unattractive about the plant catches your critical eye.

Here's stuff you can cut out any time you see it:

- **Dead wood:** Remove dead canes down to the ground level.
 - **Damaged leaves & wood:** Cut it back into about 1 inch of healthy wood.
 - **Misplaced stems:** Take off stems that are rubbing together (choose one and spare the other), stems that are taking off in the wrong direction, and stems that are trailing on the ground.
 - **Suckers:** In a grafted plant, these errant canes emerge from below the graft union (the bulge at the base of the bush). The suckers look different from the rest of the bush — they're often smoother, straighter, and lighter in color. Another clue: They sprout leaves and occasionally mongrel flowers that look nothing like the main bush.
- **Deadhead and tidy up your roses for a cleaner, more bountiful rose bed.** The plant looks better when you get rid of spent flowers. Also, because the goal of all flowering plants is to stop flowering and produce seed (in the case of rosebushes, to make rose hips), deadheading thwarts the process. So, the plant is fooled into making more flowers. Deadhead away!



TIP

Whenever you see badly damaged, diseased, or dead leaves, remove them. To be on the safe side, throw them in the trash rather than in the compost pile. Otherwise, the leaves may spread disease.

- **Prune roses in the spring to destroy all old or diseased plant material.** Early spring is the best time to prune. If it's still winter, your overeager cuts may lead to frost damage. Pruning roses is a straightforward process: Remove all non-negotiable growth, thin the plants, and then shape them. See the next pages for more on pruning roses.



REMEMBER

Experts advise cutting 1/4 inch above a bud eye so the bud eye doesn't dry out.

HOW TO PRUNE ROSES

By The National Gardening Association



You prune roses to remove parts of a plant that you don't want. This pruning leaves room for growth and circulation in the parts of the rose plant that you do want. When you prune roses, you cut the canes (upright branches) of a rosebush. You may cut the canes near the top of the plant, at the base of the plant, or somewhere in the middle, depending on the result you're trying to achieve.

Here's the skinny on why you really do want to prune your roses:

- **To improve flowering:** Proper pruning results in more or bigger blooms. Especially with hybrid teas grown for cut flowers, good pruning practices give you huge flowers atop long, strong stems. In general, the further back you cut a rose, the fewer but bigger flowers you'll get. Prune less, and you get smaller flowers but more of them.
- **To keep plants healthy:** Pruning removes diseased or damaged parts of the plant. It also keeps the plant more open in the center, increasing air circulation and reducing pest problems.
- **To keep plants in bounds:** Without pruning, many rose plants get huge. Pruning keeps them where they're supposed to be, and it also keeps the flowers at eye level, where you can enjoy them up close.
- **To direct growth:** Pruning can direct growth (and flowers) to a spot you pick. For example, you may prune a climbing rose to direct growth on a trellis.

Whenever you take a pruner to a rose cane, ask yourself why. If you don't stop to question your pruning, you may not get the effect you want.

Where winter temperatures predictably reach 10°F (-12°C) and lower, wait until after the coldest weather has passed and any winter damage to the plant has already occurred. That's usually about a month before the average date of the last spring frost — March or April for most people — and coincides nicely with when you remove your winter protection. Your local nursery or cooperative extension office can give you exact frost dates for your area.



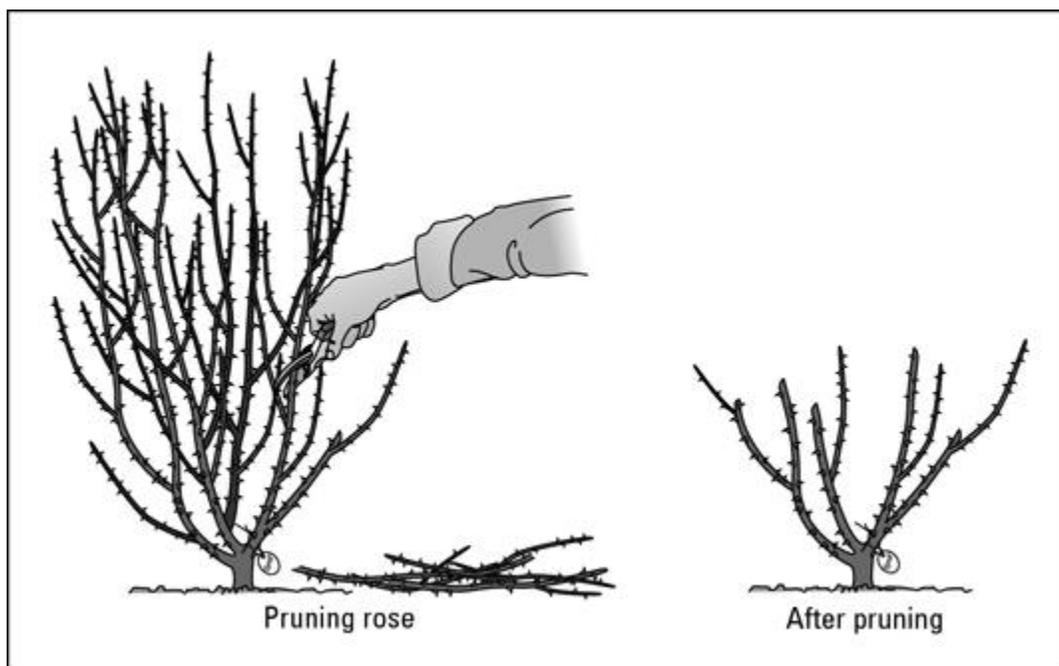
WARNING

In climates where winters are cold or pretty cold (15°F or -9°C and lower), avoid pruning in fall. Any pruning after the first frost but before really cold weather sets in usually signals the plant to grow. New canes or shoots are very tender and cold weather will kill them.

If you live where winters are mild and temperatures rarely dip below 15°F (–9°C), you have to do your pruning earlier because plants start growing earlier. January or February is usually the best time. In areas with very mild winters, rose plants never really go completely dormant or drop all their leaves, so you have to prune with some foliage still on the plant — late December to February are usual times. In such cases, pick off as many of the leaves as possible, but be careful not to damage the bark, which may lead to disease. Removing leaves helps force the plant into dormancy (even roses need a rest now and then) and removes any disease organisms that may be waiting out the winter on the foliage.

You use three types of pruning cuts when pruning roses. Each one generates a very predictable response from the plant. As your pruning prowess grows, you'll find yourself using a combination of all three types of cuts:

- **Thinning** removes a branch at its origin — that is, it cuts a branch back to another branch or to the base of the plant. Usually, thinning doesn't result in vigorous growth below the cut. The result of thinning is that the plant is more open and less densely branched. Air circulation improves, which helps prevent disease.
- **Cutting back** a dormant bud stimulates that bud to grow. If you're pruning during the dormant season — when the rose is resting and leafless in winter — the bud won't grow until spring, but this type of cut focuses the plant's energy into that one bud and maybe one or two buds below it. Pruning back to a bud is the best way to direct plant growth and to channel energy into specific canes that you want to bloom.
- **Shearing** is a more aggressive type of pruning but is sometimes effective. Use hedge clippers to whack off a portion of the plant. The result is vigorous growth below the cuts and a denser, fuller plant. Shearing is particularly effective with landscape roses, especially if you plant them as hedges.



Use clean, sharp clippers, and cut at a 45-degree angle. Cut near a bud eye, the tiny brownish or reddish bump on the stem (not to be confused with a thorn).