



Pruning

February 17, 2020

Pruning is a vital element of rose plant care and the longevity of the plant. In general, we will prune rose bushes just before the plant breaks dormancy after spring's final frost. This will be early in the year in warm climates.

When pruning roses, cut away the dead wood first.

Pruning Tools for Rose Bushes

One needs a good pair of pruning shears to do the job well. One with both blades curved will do a better job of cutting than one with flat edges. Keep the shears clean and wipe them between pruning. If you are pruning diseased plants, dip them in alcohol between plants as to not pass on the disease.

Next, you'll need a pruning saw to remove large woody canes. It will give you a clean cut without damage to the bud union. The third tool you need is a pair of lopping shears. They will provide you with leverage for the thicker canes. Finally, use a good strong pair of leather gauntlet gloves or hand gloves that are puncture proof.

Why Prune Roses?

Here are the reasons to prune:

Health: The dead or damaged canes of any rose should be cut back to green wood in late winter or early spring before the plant resumes growth. Remove diseased canes when you notice them. Improve air circulation by removing canes that grow into the center of the plant.

Appearance: Bushy modern roses need help to maintain their compact, open form. Heirloom roses require less pruning because their lax, twiggy look is part of their charm. By fall, miniature roses have grown tall and leggy. Deadheading, or cutting off spent flowers, encourages plants to rebloom.

Control: Some roses grow with wild abandon. Trimming rose bushes removes diseased and dead stems and canes and reduces the overall size of the plant. Keep them within bounds by pruning their tips or entire canes anytime. Colder evenings produce ill-formed, mottled blossoms and yellowing foliage that often starts to fall off. Rose hips, which can interrupt the next blooming cycle, may result if spent blossoms are not removed.

Rose Pruning Principles

1. **Always prune** dead wood back to healthy tissue. You will recognize the living tissue by its green bark and white pith core.
2. **Prune to ensure** the center of the bush is open for maximum air circulation.
3. **Remove all growth** on the main canes that are not capable of sustaining a reasonably thick stem on its own.
4. **If suckers**—growths from the root structure that sprout from below the bud union—are present, remove them as close to the main root cane as possible.
5. **Remove woody old canes**; saw them off as close to the bud union as you can get.
6. **After you have completed pruning your rose bush**, remove any remaining foliage from the canes and clean up debris from around the bush. Discard all foliage (do not use it in the compost heap).

How to Prune Roses

1. **Make your pruning cuts at a 45-degree angle**, about 1/4 inch above a leaf axle with a dormant eye.
2. **Choose an eye on the outside of the cane** and slope the cut down and away on the opposite side. This allows excess natural sap to rise and seal the cut without interfering with the developing eye. Cutting a rose bush to an outward-facing bud also promotes outward growth, opens up the plant to air circulation, creates more pleasing shapes, resists disease, and prevents the canes from becoming a tangle. Cuts closer to the eye than 1/4 inch may damage it. Cuts higher than that will leave a visible stubble—a haven for both pests and disease.
3. **If the rose bush has foliage present**, the location for your cut is easy to spot. Where there is no foliage to guide you, find the dormant eye by locating where the foliage was once connected. The eye is normally visible as a slight swelling above the surface of the cane.
4. **Use this same pruning technique when cutting stems for display** and when removing spent blooms. For rose bush care, remember to sharpen your pruning tools periodically.
5. **Wipe metal surfaces** after each use with a soft, lightly oiled rag to prevent rust. Store tools in a dry area.

Hybrid Tea, Grandiflora, and Floribunda Roses

Cut back your hybrid tea, grandiflora, and floribunda roses to about 18 inches tall in early spring, just before they start to grow.

Because many of these types of roses are grafted, watch for any shoots that seem to be coming from the roots and not the rose stem. These are usually unwanted suckers from the root system and should be removed at ground level.

Though it may seem like butchering, pruning this way will give you plants that produce lots of lush blooms on sturdy stems.

Tree Roses

Here in our garden, tree roses need to be pruned higher than usual to prevent the deer from eating new growth. Instead of pruning back close to the tree “trunk”, prune further up the canes, making the cuts leaving 12” or so. This way, new growth will be out of reach of the deer.

Climbing Roses

Climbing roses can be a little trickier to figure out. The best time for pruning depends on what kind of climbing rose you have. Prune those that bloom only once a year right after their blooms fade. Reblooming climbers, on the other hand, should be pruned in early spring.

Shrub Roses

Shrub roses may not need pruning at all, but it depends on what type you have. Many modern shrub roses require no pruning except to remove dead or damaged growth. If your shrub roses bloom once a year, lightly prune them back after their flowers fade. Prune back reblooming shrub roses in early spring.

Tips for Pruning Roses of All Types

- Always remove dead, diseased, or damaged growth.
- When cutting out diseased growth, dip the blades of your pruners in rubbing alcohol between each cut to help prevent spreading disease.
- Avoid leaving dead, ugly stubs on stems by making your cuts about 1/4 inch above a leaf bud.
- Prevent a tangled mess of rose shoots by making your cut to a bud that's pointing away from the center of the plant. (Buds facing the center will grow shoots that grow into the middle of the rose.)
- Cut out any thin, weak growth. On most roses (except miniatures), the general rule is to cut back any stem thinner than a pencil's thickness.

Photos from our class:



