

# PRUNING ROSES

FOR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S MILD COASTAL ZONES

Since your roses haven't read the same books you have, you can discard most of the pruning misinformation in print. Rose plants store food for flowering and new growth in the roots and canes. Severe pruning removes this stored supply and can limit potential flowering. The old rule that hard pruning produces fewer but larger flowers does not apply to a home garden. Moderate pruning results in more flowers, most of which will be perfect for arranging in bouquets.

Invest in a few good tools that will last. A pair of scissor-type secateurs for small cuts, a pair of loppers, a folding saw for the bigger cuts, and a heavy-duty pair of gloves are all that's really needed.

**When:** *Any time from January 1, to February 15.*

**Why:**

- *To promote a symmetrical shape*
- *To promote a dormant rest period*
- *To renew the bush*
- *Moderate pruning will promote more flowers*

**What:**

- *Prune out all dead and damaged growth*
- *Prune out any crossover canes and open up the center*
- *Prune out any suckers*

MAKE SURE THAT YOUR PRUNERS ARE SHARP! A CLEAN CUT IS IMPORTANT.

**How:**

- *Prune one-third to one-half of the previous year's growth*
- *Make clean cuts immediately above a leaf bud*
- *Prune to outside facing buds*
- *Leave all productive canes possible*
- *For each new cane produced one old cane can be removed*
- *Open up center of plant to light and air*
- *Remove all foliage*
- *Rake up and remove all debris from beds*
- *Seal all cuts larger than a pencil with white glue; do not use petroleum-based products.*

USE A DORMANT SPRAY TO CLEAN UP OVER-WINTERING PESTS AND DISEASES.

## PRUNING CLIMBING ROSES

Pruning climbing roses is not quite like pruning a bush rose. It is important to understand how climbing roses grow and flower. Roses produce hormones in their growing tips that inhibit flower formation further down the cane. When the cane is arched over so that the growth tip is below horizontal this hormone is trapped in the tip and the cane will produce new flowering shoot at each bud eye along the cane. This means, instead of a cluster of three flowers only at the tip, an arched cane can produce thirty or more clusters of flowers all along the cane. In addition to following all the directions for Pruning Roses, include these tips for climbers:

- *When pruning out a cane, remove it back to a main cane or bud union*
- *Arch over and tie all canes to be retained*
- *Prune flowering shoots back to four to six bud eyes*

## PRUNING OLD GARDEN AND SHRUB ROSES

- Basic pruning techniques for the Old Garden Roses (OGRs) are not all that different than those for modern roses. Gallica, Damask, Alba, Centifolia, and Moss roses are OGRs that only bloom in Spring. Prune these right after they finish blooming; this is usually sometime in early summer. The Damask roses in particular resent hard pruning, so it is best to only remove dead wood and lightly prune flowering shoots back a few inches.
- Repeat-blooming OGRs like: Tea, China, Portland, Bourbon, Hybrid Perpetual, Perpetual Damask, and Perpetual Moss roses are pruned at the same time as modern roses (January to February). Tea and China roses produce flowers on small twiggy growth and should only be lightly pruned. It is not necessary to open up the bushes as recommended for Hybrid Teas because these roses need the internal support of the branched, twiggy growth to hold up their flowers. Remove dead and damaged growth, then lightly tip back flowering shoots to strong, outside-facing leaf buds.
- Treat Portland, Bourbon, Hybrid Perpetual, Perpetual Damask, and Perpetual Moss roses as Hybrid Teas. Strong growing Hybrid Perpetual roses require hard pruning to promote flowering, so plan to remove at least one half of last year's growth to produce better flowers.
- A common complaint directed at the once-flowering Gallica roses is that they often produce very few flowers in our mild coastal regions. Gallica roses in particular require winter chilling to flower; often our mild winters are just not cold enough to produce flowers. Select sites for these OGRs that take advantage of microclimates which might be colder or more protected from our hot dry winter sun and wind.
- Many OGRs become large, arching shrubs, so plan for sufficient space for these large roses. Pegging or self-pegging are efficient methods for controlling vigorous OGRs. When pegging, don't prune back the long canes, but spread them out over the ground and attach them with pegs made of wire or wood. This system requires a lot of space, and may not work in smaller gardens. Self-pegging is much the same as normal pegging but instead, you arch the long canes over and tie them back onto themselves with green garden tape. Shorten some of the canes and select the best, long, supple canes for tying back.
- Some OGRs can be trained onto tripods. Construct tripods from three metal garden stakes spaced around the plant. Pull the stakes together with wire or green garden tape and then begin winding the long canes around the tripod, attaching them to the structure with tape. As in self-pegging, this system will produce more blooms along the canes, just as arching over climbing roses produces flowers all along the cane.
- Species and Shrub roses are pruned in January and, for the most part, all that is really needed is pruning out any dead or damaged growth and shortening back flowering shoots a few inches. Again, many of these roses can become quite large, arching plants, so plan to allow them sufficient room to grow in your landscape.
- English Roses are mostly repeat-blooming and are pruned like Hybrid Teas. The larger-growing English Roses can be self-pegged to control their size and spread. This is an effective way to grow the big English

Roses! Remove any dead or damaged growth and shorten back flowering shoots from one-third to one-half of last year's growth.

- Many OGRs are sold as own root plants and will not produce suckers. Any shoots coming out of the ground should be retained.

**When:** Gallica, Damask, Alba, Centifolia, and Moss Roses: Prune in early Summer after they finish flowering.

Tea, China, Noisette, Bourbon, Hybrid Perpetual, Perpetual Damask, Repeat-blooming Moss, Species and English Roses: Prune January 1 to February 15

## PLANTING ROSES

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- Bare root planting season for roses extends from December through February.
- It is best to plant new roses the same day as purchased. If that is not possible, soak bare root plants overnight in a bucket of water. You can store roses this way for two or three days, but plant them as soon as possible.
- Select a site with as much sun as possible; six to eight hours is best, but a minimum of four hours a day will work. Also pick a site away from competing roots of trees and large shrubs.
- Almost any soil will suit roses, but for best results, healthy plants, and optimum flower production, the addition of organic compost (planting mix) will both increase soil aeration and promote moisture retention.
- For grafted and own-root grown roses, dig a hole about twice as wide and twice as deep as the plants root system (approximately two feet by two feet and as deep should be adequate).
- Mix a good grade of organic compost (planting mix) 50/50 with soil removed from hole. Build a cone of soil/compost mix and spread roots out evenly. Make sure that the bud union (grafted plants) or canes (own root plants) will rest on final soil level.
- Backfill the planting hole with soil/compost mix, firming soil with your foot to make sure that there are no air pockets around the roots. Build a ring of soil around the hole to aid in watering.
- Water the plant in well, soaking it several times. Check newly-planted roses for water at least once a week until established. Don't add fertilizer at planting time. Wait until roses starts growing and, when the new shoots are about three inches long (usually sometime in March), then apply fertilizer.
- If the weather is hot and dry, cover the new canes with soil/compost mix to prevent them from drying out. Place a large brown paper grocery bag (with the bottom cut out) over the newly planted rose. Fill with moist soil or compost, and water well to give the new plant a chance to establish. Pull back the moist soil mix when new shoots start showing, usually around two weeks.

***ENJOY THE ROSES!***

*Courtesy of Clair G. Martin, Curator Emeritus Huntington Rose Garden ©2015*