Friday’s Feature
By
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Prune roses in September for beautiful fall blooms

Florida's high light intensity, warm temperatures, and mild winters allow roses to grow year-round. For the gardener, this means year-round maintenance.

In late summer, many rose bushes are not at their best. It’s sometimes hard to believe that the blackspot-ridden bushes of summer have any potential for beauty. But as temperatures moderate, roses will begin to flourish and produce the lush new growth that will nourish their fall flush of blooms. Our job now is to give them the help they need to make that transformation.

Roses are very fond of water and require one to two inches of it every week. In periods of hot, dry temperatures, even more may be needed depending on the size of the bushes as well as whether or not they are appropriately mulched. In spite of their need for an abundance of water, roses hate standing in water so it is important that the gardener provide adequate drainage for the rose bed.

Roses need frequent fertilization. If your roses have not been fertilized recently, an application of fertilizer now will be beneficial. If granular fertilizer is used, be sure to spread it well beyond the drip line of the foliage.

If blackspot fungus is a problem, a weekly application of a fungicide is especially important. This will provide a “protective shield” over the new growth that will reduce blackspot and powdery mildew. Plan to spray in the morning, so you won't need to worry about evening thunderstorms washing chemicals off your just-sprayed bushes.

To stimulate fall blooms, early September is the time to cut back bushes by about one-third. On average, it takes six weeks from this pruning until new blooms appear. The new growth that appears will produce healthier foliage and bigger, more colorful blooms in October.

The tools you will need include sharp hand pruners and a pair of leather gloves. You might also need loppers if you have to cut woody canes larger than one-half inch in diameter. Proper tools make the job easier, and you’ll be less likely to damage your rose bushes or scratch your hands on the thorns.
First, all the dead growth should be removed. Make your cuts well into the healthy part of the canes just above a leaf or dormant bud – or remove the dead cane entirely back to its point of origin.

Next, remove weak, spindly canes the diameter of a pencil or less, particularly those growing in the interior of the plant. Cut them off at their point of origin, making sure you do not leave a stub. If you see any sprouts originating from the root stock (below the large, knobby graft union), cut them off, too. Do not remove any strong new shoots growing from the graft union, however.

The major part of the pruning involves shortening the remaining vigorous canes. This pruning needs to be done even if there are flowers on the bush.

Ideally, try to make each cut just above a bud that faces outward (away from the inside of the bush). The cuts should be made about one-fourth inch above the bud at a slight angle slanting away from the bud. Don’t leave a large stub sticking up above the bud or you will encourage stem rot, and don’t cut too close to the bud or you will kill it.

Clean up and dispose of all leaves and prunings from the area.

Some roses, including many climbing roses, ramblers and old roses, only bloom once in spring or early summer. They should NOT be pruned back now, since they will produce flowers next year on the growth they made this summer. Cutting them back now or anytime before they bloom next year will reduce the number of flowers they produce.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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