

Why prune?

Roses like other woody plants are pruned to produce flowers. Roses are grown for their wonderful colour, scent and prolonged flowering season. Modern roses like Hybrid Teas and Floribundas flower much better on younger wood, which is encouraged by annual pruning.

How to prune:

There are many different types of roses but the basic principles are the same:

- Use sharp, clean tools and a good pair of gloves.
- Remove any dead, dying and diseased wood.
- Open up the center of the plant to allow for good air circulation and light to enter, this will encourage healthy new growth.
- Make a cut just above a chosen bud (approx. 1cm/1/4 inch) if you cut to close the bud tissue will be damaged, too far away and there will be unsightly die back.
- Defoliate plants after pruning to get rid of any fungal disease that may infect the plant next year.
- Tidy around the plant removing any leaves or pruning's from the ground to avoid pest and disease problems.

Pruning established roses

Before starting formative pruning assess the plant on health and form and decide how you want to proceed. The first step is to prune out the three D's, diseased, damaged and dead wood, leaving you with only the healthy canes to work with.

Hybrid Tea (generally one large flower per stem)

At pruning time remove the older stems to create an open center leaving about 4 to 5 healthy stems. Cut back the remaining stems to 4 to 6 buds from the ground (approx. 15cm/6 inch). Stems which are slightly weaker can be reduced to 2 to 4 buds to encourage them to try again.

Floribunda (cluster flowered)

At pruning time remove the older stems to create an open center leaving 6 to 8 healthy stems and reduce the remaining stems to 6 to 8 buds (approx. 30cm/12 inch). Older stems can be cut shorter to help encourage new growth.

Standards

Standards are normally Hybrid Teas. Floribundas or ground cover roses budded onto a 1.5m stem stock. Standard roses are pruned in the same way as the top growth as if it were growing in the ground, but leaving slightly more growth. If they are pruned too hard the root and stem stock may produce suckers. If allowed to become too top heavy they are likely to fall over or snap.

Climbers

For the first two years do not prune, just tie in new shoots. Build up a framework of strong stems, training the new shoots to fill the structure they are climbing up. Bending the stems encourages lateral shoots, which in turn produce flowers. In winter prune back laterals and flowered shoots to 2 to 3 buds from the framework. One or two older stems can be cut out at the base if there are younger shoots that can be tied in to take their place. Removing or reducing older stems encourages new growth from the base.

Ramblers

Ramblers are normally more lax in their growth and are generally more vigorous than climbers. The text books say to prune ramblers in late summer by removing flowered growth and tying in the new stems for the following year's flowers. This will remove a good deal of the still productive older wood that will photosynthesise during the late summer to create a stronger plant and also remove hips that provide attractive winter interest. Here at the Gardens of the Rose we prune ramblers the same as climbers, in Nov/Dec. We select healthy stems to create a framework and remove a portion of the older stems at the base. The lateral shoots of stems that have flowered are pruned back to 2 to 3 buds. If growing up a mature tree no pruning is required.

Modern shrub roses / English roses (David Austin)

In early Feb canes can be reduced by half or two thirds, depending on vigor and the desired eventual height. Prune harder to keep plants more contained and aim to encourage the regular production of strong new canes from the base. Established plants will require the removal of a portion of older stems from the base. To provide a bush furnished in flower from head to toe, stagger pruning cuts in height to create a dome shape. Thin growth may not produce much flower but will produce leaves vital for photosynthesis, so only remove old, damaged or badly placed stems.

Old shrub roses

Old shrub roses require little pruning; normally just the removal of very old unsightly stems to allow new growth from the base. Over pruning can spoil the shape of the plant and can reduce flower quality. Remove 2 or 3 stems completely each year in winter and remove the old flower tips of the stems.

Groundcover roses

In early Feb any upright growth can be reduced by 1/3 or 1/2. Long laterals can be treated in the same way but if space is tight they can be reduced to 3 to 4 buds. They will tolerate being cut back hard occasionally (once every 3 years to 15-25cm/6 - 9 inch) so that they regenerate from the base. Prune the plant to fit the space, groundcover roses are quite diverse and can be pruned according to your needs, although a well fed regularly pruned plant will more new growth from the base.

Patio, miniature or container roses

Little pruning is required but as with all roses remove the dead, dying and diseased stems. Strong stems can be reduced in height by 1/3 and any laterals pruned to a good shape.

Species roses

These are best left to create their own natural habit as they would in the wild. Like old shrub roses they only need old stems taken out at the base to rejuvenate them every now and then.

Pruning neglected roses

- Start by trying to identify the type of rose.
- Do this by allowing it to flower. Is it grafted?
- Does it repeat flower?
- How much growth does it produce in a year?
- What type of leaf does it have?

In January or February remove the three D's. Assess what you have left and how much you dare to remove in one go. The height can be reduced harshly to get the plant to branch from lower down; this may "kill or cure" but will get the rose to the desired height. To regain control; may take several years. Remove up to one third of the older stems each year. If it is a climber or rambler it is better to remove the rose from the structure or frame and select the healthy stems to tie back into structure.

Dead heading

Dead heading by cutting off spent flowers to the first set of leaves or the next strong bud. If a stem is too tall and out of keeping with the rest of the plant this can be reduced further to achieve a uniform habit and encourage the production of lateral shoots.

Planting and bed preparation

Bed preparation

Select the right roses for the site considering the overall size, flowering and disease resistance. The ideal rose growing soil is free draining and fertile and positioned in full sun. Dig in plenty of well-rotted organic matter such as garden compost or farmyard manure prior to planting. Ideal pH is 6.5 for most roses so it is wise to test it before carrying out any work, amend limey soils with sulphur and acidic soils with lime in spring. Avoid planting roses where they have recently grown to limit the phenomenon known as rose sickness. Rose sickness is the failure of new roses to establish and thrive and is thought to be the result of a buildup of soil borne pathogens and pests. Approaches to dealing with the problem include replacing the soil, use of soil sterilants and improving husbandry by the addition of organic matter and inoculation of new plants with products such as rootgrow that contain beneficial mycorrhizal fungi.

Planting

Bare root roses are available between November and March and should be planted whilst still dormant; aim to have all your roses planted by middle of March. The general rule is to plant bare root roses as soon as possible. If planting is not possible heel them into some soil in a sheltered position or store in a cool dry place such as a garage until conditions improve. Do not let the roots dry out. Containerised or container grown roses are available all year round but are the more expensive way to buy. Avoid planting in hot dry weather and if planting out of season be prepared to water plants copiously until established.

- Check condition of the plant; are stems shriveled, damaged or broken?
- Soak in water for a few hours before planting.
- If planting during winter, tip the stems back to a healthy bud to remove ragged cuts and damaged caused in transit. If planting in spring prune bush roses to 10cm/4 inch prior to planting.
- Tip roots back to get rid of any damaged, but leave the fibrous roots alone.
- Dig a hole big enough for the root system.
- Place the rose in the hole so that the roots are well spaced and the graft union sits 3inch below soil level.
- Sprinkle granular mycorrhizal fungi directly onto the roots over the planting hole.
- Back fill the hole with soil, firm a little, and then shake the plant to allow soil to fall around the roots. Fill in the rest of the soil, firm in with the heel of your boot and water well.
- Stake standard roses.

- Apply a suitable fertilizer directly around the base of the plant before mulching in spring such as Growmore or Vitax Q4.

Planting distances

Hybrid Tea and Floribundas: 30-40cm/12-16 inch for smaller plants, 40-60cm/16-24 inch for stronger growers.

Groundcover: 60-90cm/24-36 inch depending on eventual spread.

Miniature and patio roses: 40cm/16inch

Modern English shrub roses: 35-55cm/14-18 inch. Plants may be grouped close together to give impression of one large plant if suitably pruned.

Shrub roses: 60-120cm/24-48 inch

Climbers/ramblers: 180cm/72 inch

Pruning newly planted roses

In their first spring, prune back newly planted hybrid teas and floribundas to 10cm/4 inch. This may seem harsh but it will encourage root production and cause the plant to branch more freely from the base.

Shrubs, climbers and ramblers only require the removal of damaged growth.

Pest and Disease

Roses can potentially suffer from an array of pest and disease problems. With pesticides being withdrawn all the time and a change in social views on pesticide use a lot of research in recent years has been carried out on growing roses in a more environmentally sound manner. The best advice is to plant healthy disease resistant roses that require little or no spraying. If you are unsure about what cultivars to choose the Gold Standard roses or Rose of the Year are good indicators of garden worthy plants.

- Disease can be controlled by being tidy in the garden and raking up leaves or picking off infected leaves. A thick layer of mulch each spring covers up disease overwintering on the ground, limiting the severity of infection.
- Feed roses to keep them healthy. Feed in spring after pruning and again after dead heading the first flush of flowers.
- Additional liquid feeding with seaweed extracts and Phosphite products (Uncle Toms Tonic) will help boost plant health and enhance the ability of the plants to resist disease.
- A spraying regime can be implemented as soon as the leaf buds appear. This should consist of a systemic fungicide. Although these are becoming harder to obtain.
- Where possible, avoid using insecticides as these kill beneficial insects as well as pests.
- Aphids can be controlled effectively in a small area by squashing them between your finger and thumb.
- Encourage lacewings and ladybirds to overwinter by using insect boxes or planting suitable plants for them to overwinter on and feed upon.

The Rose Year

November - January

Prune ramblers and climbers in suitable weather conditions. Plant new roses. Bare root roses will be available to buy until March; order early to get the variety you want. Do not plant in frosty conditions.

Mid-late February

Prune shrub roses, Hybrid Teas and Floribundas if weather permits. Check posts on the standard roses and replace if necessary.

March - April

Finish pruning making sure to remove all remaining diseased material from the beds. Feed with a suitable fertilizer and mulch to retain moisture and help suppress fungal spores present in the soil. After bud-break apply a preventative spray of your chosen fungicide.

May - July

Continue spraying, including foliar feeds. Roses will be starting to bloom in June. Keep an eye on newly planted and spot water if required. Carry out general maintenance: light weeding, edging etc. Remove spent blooms and apply second topdressing of fertilizer after the first flush of flowers.

August - October

Tie in new growth made by climbers and ramblers; the new wood is supple and easy to bend. Continue deadheading until September and finishing spraying.