

Spring Care for Roses and Hydrangeas

It is that time of year again when the calls start coming in about when should I trim back my hydrangeas because they never bloomed last year?? Hydrangeas and roses are two of our favorite shrubs that folks love to hate. Let's look at what we need to do right now to make them beautiful and floriferous all season long.

The pruning of hydrangeas is probably the biggest hurdle for most gardeners, especially when the type of plant is not known. Pruning improves vigor and increases number and flower size. Think about when the plants bloomed last year. Did they bloom on older stems?? Those that bloom on old wood are the bigleaf hydrangeas and include *Hydrangea macrophylla*, *H. serrata*, and the oakleaf hydrangea *H. quercifolia*. The blooms are removed above the first leaf when they begin to fade. Older canes or stems that look dark or straggly can be removed now all the way to the soil line. To maintain size and shape, taller canes can also be pruned to the ground.

Hydrangeas that bloom on new wood grow and set their buds the same year that they bloom. These include the panicle hydrangea *H. paniculata*, and the smooth hydrangea *H. aborescens*. All canes may be aggressively cut back in early spring or when plants go dormant in the fall. While this prevents a short-term issue, there is some consensus that may affect the long-term health of the plant, so be judicious in your pruning. To prevent flopping on weak, new canes, prune all canes back to 12 – 18" which can better support heavy blossoms. Both types can be fertilized with an acidic fertilizer now and watered in well. Plants grow best on northern and eastern sun exposures.

Roses also benefit from pruning second year canes, or older, if the bush has been neglected. Shaping and allowing for more air flow can increase vigor and more and bigger blooms. Using loppers instead of shears will cause a cleaner cut and less damage of mashing stems, cutting off any obvious dead or damaged wood to

the ground. First year growth produces the most flowers and cutting green canes just above an outward facing bud will open up the center of the bush and keep growth facing out. Prune roses aggressively to leave about 4 to 6 canes. Next remove any excess mulch from the winter which could harbor disease or promote rot. Water the plant (on the soil, not on the foliage) before applying a rose fertilizer. One inch of compost applied around the base of the rose introduces beneficial microbes to keep down disease. Natural products that contain a fungicide, an insecticide and a fertilizer are recommended and available to apply now.