

Springtime Care of Roses

Spring has come early this year, and many of you may see leaves coming out on your roses already. It is not too late to prune your roses and you should also begin to think about spring control of insects, cankers, and black spot.

For pruning, the general recommendation is to cut the rose stem back to an outward facing bud above the first five-leaflet or seven-leaflet leaf. Dead canes should be removed and remaining canes should be thinned to allow for air circulation and to encourage growth. Remember, pruning your roses is the first step to managing pests in your garden! Use sharp pruners and cut at a 45-degree angle, slanting away from the bud. Always clean your pruners with a cloth soaked in alcohol between rose bushes or you could risk the spread of diseases such as Rose Rosette or canker. If cane bores are a problem, seal the ends of the cuts with white glue. Remove all thin and weak canes that are smaller than a pencil in diameter.

The pruning of roses can be confusing, so it is important to know the type of roses you have planted in your garden. Modern, or ever-blooming roses, should be cut back by about one-half to two-thirds of the plant's height to encourage new growth and blooms, leaving three to five healthy canes evenly spaced around the plant. Antique roses, modern shrub roses (e.g. Knockouts), or English roses should be pruned for shape. To know how much to cut, use the "one-third method" or removing 1/3 of the old canes, leaving 1/3 of the new canes, and removing the remaining canes. Remember, blooming roses should be pruned only after flowering because they only bloom on old wood.

Climbers and ramblers can be left unpruned for the first few years. With large climbers, pruning is usually done only to clean up dead wood. Training your climber horizontally on a trellis encourages more blooms. Cut side shoots or laterals to 3-6 inches to stimulate flower production for a spectacular display of flowers in May.

After all of the pruning is completed, follow up with a spray of dormant oil or Sulphur to kill overwintering aphids or pests. Make sure to clear all the old dead leaves from underneath your rose bushes. These old leaves can harbor blackspot and other unwanted visitors and so it is best to clear them away.

Start adding organic fertilizer such as manure, compost, or blood meal to your soil now. Organic fertilizers are not fast acting, so it can take a while for nutrients to be released. Late winter to early spring is the perfect time to add these beneficial nutrients and microorganisms to your soil as they work best when soil temperatures are cool. If in doubt, get a soil sample and bring it to the OSU Extension Office (4116 East 15th Street, Tulsa) to find out what nutrients may be lacking in your beds.

For even more information, see OSU Fact Sheets [HLA-6403](#) and [EPP-7607](#).