

Late Summer Rose Care

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Ever notice how the most beautiful blooms occur when the weather is delightfully warm in the daytime and cool in the evening? (June!) When there is adequate rainfall and you only need to supplement it a bit? (June!) Every wonder why the English Rose Gardens are so beautiful? How do they grow those fabulous blooms with all of their cool, wet weather? They very rarely have to put up with our August conditions.

The month of August is surely a test for rose gardeners. Every possible element for decimating our wonderful rose bushes is present now. The extreme heat and humidity...all create the precise conditions for a pest-ridden, bloomless garden. But now is not the time to throw up your hands and give up. Now is the time to stick to good gardening practices and here are some suggestions for assuring that your roses will survive and bloom again.

DEAD HEADING – Continue to dead head all of your roses that are repeat blooming, throughout the summer. By removing the spent bloom, you signal the plant to continue to produce new growth and additional blooms and not to go to seed (produce hips). If the spent bloom is allowed to remain on the bush, the hip will develop and that is a sign for the bush to slow down on new growth and prepare for dormancy. So keep on deadheading to keep your roses blooming. Many of the OGRs will produce gorgeous hips, and you may want to consider leaving those spent blooms on the bush in order to enjoy the hips display.

SUMMER PRUNING – Cutting your beautiful blooms for display in your home is a form of summer pruning. All diseased and dead wood should continue to be removed throughout the growing season. By the time August arrives, our rose bushes can be quite stressed, with very few leaves and the classic “bare knees” syndrome. If the bush is looking very sickly, prune it back as you would in the spring, with about one third of the plant removed. As the weather becomes less severe, the bush rejuvenates and will more than likely produce a lovely fall bloom. For roses that are once blooming, other than removing dead and diseased wood, do not prune them back. They will bloom next year on the wood they produce this year, so if you prune them back now, they will not bloom next year.

WATER! WATER! WATER! – Remember to continue to provide enough water for your roses through the hot summer days. A severely dried out plant is much more prone to disease and insect damage. So keep your roses watered well. If you are growing in containers – do not let them dry out completely. On very hot days you may have to water them more than once. If your watering method wets the foliage – water early in the day to allow the leaves to dry before sundown. If you use drip irrigation, watering at night is fine. Whatever your method, watering at a time when the temperature is lower – overnight or early morning – will allow the plants to absorb most of the water you put down, while watering in the heat of the day will see much of the water evaporating before the plant has a chance to take it in.

FERTILIZING – August is the last time that you should apply fertilizer to the rose beds or containers. The exception to this rule is that you should NOT apply a time release fertilizer now. Any fertilizer applied after August will promote new growth that may not have a chance

to harden off before the cold weather arrives. Applying a time release fertilizer in August amounts to continuing to fertilize in September, October, etc.

SPRAYING – Continue with your spray program through to the end of the season. This is the time of the year that it is most difficult to keep up a regular schedule, but it's also the time for Blackspot and other fungus diseases. Remember to wear protective clothing, eye protection, a mask and gloves. To reduce your pain and suffering, consider spraying very early in the morning before it gets too hot. Also be aware that you should not spray in the extreme heat or you will burn the foliage.

ENJOYING YOUR ROSES – Take time from all of your gardening chores to “stop and smell the roses”. For wonderful and inventive suggestions on ways to use your roses that range from simple to elaborate – I refer you to an excellent book written by Ellen Spector-Platt, “BEYOND THE GARDEN – EASY & ELEGANT ROSE DESIGN”.