

Putting Your Rose Garden To Bed For The Winter (Oct-7-2008)

By: Pat Shanley, NYS District Director

Although our roses are still blooming, the time to put your rose garden to bed is fast approaching. The question frequently asked is "What do you prune at this time of the year?" The answer is nothing, including your roses, should be pruned until they are dormant or until we have had more than one hard frost.

If you have not had a soil test performed this year, this is the time. If the test shows you need to correct the pH with lime, do it now. The winter months will provide adequate time and precipitation for the lime to break down before spring arrives.

With regard to winterizing your roses – remember there is no right or wrong answer. If you have not done any winter protection in the past two years and have not lost a single rose, then do nothing. If you have lost roses as a result of the winter weather, you may wish to consider providing them some protection. Here are a few additional tips:

1. After the frost sets in and you are able to do your winter pruning, remember not to prune the once blooming roses, or you will cut off the blooms for next season. In anticipation of Winter-Die-Back, I prune very little at this time of the year.
2. The winter temperatures should cause most of the leaves on your rose bushes to fall off. Some Rosarians remove all the leaves now. Depending on how many rose bushes you have, you may want to remove them AFTER THEY ARE DORMANT. Removing the old leaves permits the bush to start with fresh new leaves in the spring. Old leaves left on may carry spores of blackspot, etc. and re-infect the newly emerging leaves and canes.
3. Remember to send your garden into the winter with clean beds – free of any diseased leaves that may have fallen.
4. Do not use the existing soil around your roses to "Hill Up" for winter protection. Bring in fresh soil. Disturbing the soil around the rose will upset and damage its root system. Adding compost or a thick layer of pine bark mulch to "hill up" your roses is a great way to tuck your roses in for the winter. You can also use shredded oak leaves which will add texture and nutrients to the soil as they break down over the winter.
5. Remember to keep watering your roses until the ground freezes.
6. Consider applying an anti-desiccant, such as WiltPruf, to protect against wind damage.
7. Thoroughly clean and inspect all container plants that were growing out of doors before bringing them inside for the winter.
8. If you are growing in containers and don't have a place to store them over the winter, try grouping them together in a spot on your terrace/garden that will offer some protection from the wind. They can be covered with leaves, straw or branches cut from a discarded Christmas tree! If you use an unheated indoor space to store your roses over the winter, remember to water them periodically so that the root system does not dry out.

9. Now is a great time to evaluate your rose garden. Note which roses thrived and which did not. This will help you plan for adding new varieties next year. Also note what fertilizers and additives you used, the frequency of application and their effectiveness.

10. Keep an eye out for the January/ February issue of American Rose magazine. The Annual ARS Guide to US Nurseries will be in that issue. The Guide provides the Nursery name, contact information and a brief description of what the nursery offers. We hope that when you are planning which roses to buy, you will look to this listing. Another benefit of ARS membership!