

Pruning Tips

Here in Northern California we prune roses from January until mid-February, putting our roses into dormancy to provide a good bloom cycle in the spring. Most of the varieties bloom on new growth.

Remember the following: dead, diseased, crossing and skimpy. Use these four words as a guide to remove canes for all hybrid teas, floribundas, grandifloras, shrubs, miniatures and repeat blooming old garden roses. The exception is once blooming old garden roses: prune these after spring bloom.

Proper Equipment: Sturdy gloves, your favorite sharpened shears, long handled clippers, a small saw, warm clothes with a smooth surface (to avoid ripping on the thorns and prickles), a full rain suit, water-proof shoes, and a hat or cap, sunglasses or eyeglasses for eye protection.

Now go out to your garden and take a good look at the growth on the bushes and climbers. Look at the height and width of all of the bushes. This will tell you how much to prune: moderate to low for a very prolific hybrid tea or grandiflora or medium for a low growing shrub. Prune knee high for most hybrid teas or waist high for tall grandifloras or tall shrubs.

Before beginning, try to defoliate the bush and discard all the diseased leaves. Do not compost any diseased leaves. Push mulch aside from the center of the plant to check for any suckers coming from below the bud union and remove any sucker by cutting off as close to the root as possible. Begin pruning from the top and work down to the correct height for the bush with outward facing canes and leaving the center open. Make cuts with the cutting blade facing downward and at a 45-degree angle one-quarter inch above the outward facing growth eye or swollen line on the cane.

Miniatures: They are easy; cut back three or four inches and clean out dead wood. Now is the time to replant if the mini has been in a pot for more than three years.

Old Garden Roses and Shrubs: They require less pruning than hybrid teas. Examples are bourbons, chinas, teas, hybrid perpetuals and noisettes. Remove dead canes and prune to shape bushes. You may leave some inward facing canes for a full look on shrubs. Repeat blooming varieties prune similar to modern roses. Shrubs cut back about one-third of the bush and shape.

Climbers: It is best to let newly planted climbers alone for the first three years, allowing the long canes to become laterals filled with blooms in years to come. Remove dead and diseased canes. Remove suckers and remove oldest and weakest canes. Cut back on each shoot to two or more leaf buds along the lateral canes. Retain four or five of the most vigorous canes. Re-tie to the trellis or support, knotting the string around the support, then loosely around the cane.

Tree or Standard: A standard or tree rose has three parts; the under stock, the trunk, and the bud union at the top of the trunk. Prune on the top growth for good symmetry and reduce to three to five strong canes outward facing with an open bowl shape. Remember to support the trunk top and bottom to withstand any wind.

Tetanus: Keep current with a booster shot every 10 years minimum. Check with your doctor as some suggest every five years. Natural habit of bacterium is responsible for the infection in the soil and the spores it produces are widely distributed everywhere. When growing it produces a toxin 50 times as poisonous as cobra venom. A wound from a thorn prick can harbor enough bacterium to produce sufficient toxin to kill an unvaccinated human. So, beware if you are active in the garden and protect yourself from this disease and keep your immunization current.

Finally, when you have completed pruning you can now clean up the garden and dispose of all the clippings: do not compost as the rose diseases can over-winter and remain in the soil.

Now decide which roses you want to discard and replace with a newer variety or move to a better location in the garden. Reinvigorate your rose garden with a few new roses. It is a great time to plant bare root roses.

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