

Rose Care for February

February is one of my favorite months in the garden. It is a time to look back and think about last year's challenges and look forward to working towards a healthy, water wise, environmentally friendly garden.

Most rose gardeners are working hard to finish up their pruning to meet the suggested rule of thumb deadline of February 14th. Pruning is a time of rejuvenation, removal of damaged and weak canes, and disposal of tired diseased foliage. Keep your tools sharp for a good clean cut and dip your shears periodically into a 70% alcohol solution or wipe with disinfecting wipes to avoid spreading disease.

Why is it that for every perfectly placed outside facing bud eye there are 20 that are not? For any rose questions, connect with another neighborhood rose gardener or Consulting Rosarian listed on this website that can help you. That's what I did. Thank you to Joan Goff for helping me prune 'Hot Cocoa'.

Basics of February: Finish pruning, remove old leaves and debris from under rose bushes, move misplaced roses, shovel prune old non-productive roses, plant new bareroot roses, pull back last year's compost and check drip irrigation emitters, looking for leaks and using goof plugs to cap irrigation where plants no longer exist, secure lateral canes of climbers, start or update your garden journal, and place your order for mulch.

February is the perfect time to move plants while in their dormant state and to add bareroot plants that can be kept moist with the rains. Use mulch to protect newly planted bareroots or any plants subject to root disturbance when moved. Don't waste your money and time on applying fertilizer in February. The soil is too cool for soil bacteria to become active, alfalfa pellets will be washed away, and you'll just have to do it again.

Make plans for Mulch! Some soil experts suggest that all you need is organic mulch and to mulch, mulch, mulch to build healthy soil and there is no need to apply additional fertilizer. This might be the year to test this theory in that all chemical fertilizers are salts, requiring more water to avoid burning effects. Purchase a simple, garden soil moisture meter and test for moisture in your garden soil. Resist turning on drip irrigation until absolutely necessary. Garden centers sell garden soil moisture meters for under \$20.

Start a garden journal if you do not have one. Record the names of roses in your collection and the year you planted them. When did the deer first dine in your garden? When did the leaf rollers and rose curculios come on the scene and which roses were they most attracted to? Write down questions for Consulting Rosarians and bring them to our next monthly meeting or send them through an email.

This is when I suggest tolerance and patience in the garden. Share a few rose leaves with the leaf cutter bees in return for their immense importance in overall garden pollination. Be patient, the soldier beetles and ladybugs will arrive and rid your garden of aphids. Your roses are dormant, the ground beneath is raked free of black spot and rust infected leaves. Think ahead to the warmer weather. Make a resolution to walk through your garden, looking for early signs of trouble before they wreak havoc in your rose garden. Enjoy that feeling of knowing you have done all you can and look forward to that first bloom of the year...which of course you will record in your journal.

By Betty Mott, Consulting Rosarian

Edited for the website by Nanette Londeree, December 2019