

HINTS AND TIPS FOR GROWING ROSES

by Rod Pengelly

I should point out this is how I grow my exhibition hybrid tea (HT) roses. Others do their roses to suit their own site and to their own liking.

Preparation of the Rose Bed

The rose season starts in September and so you should have chosen the varieties you want to grow. They will need a 2ft gap between each bush and you should never have a bed with more than two rows of HT roses. The plants need to have a good air flow or you will have mildew problems. Double dig the bed (if possible). Dig in as much compost as you can (rose, tree and shrub is good) and a two year old manure. Leave to settle.

Planting

Your new roses should arrive in November. Soak the roots for 24 hours and then plant in the prepared bed.

Lightly "heel in" to get rid of air pockets. I use "Root Grow" which gives the roots a good start. If the ground is dry, water them in with at least a gallon of water per plant. Check them during the winter; any which have moved or are loose "heel in" again (lightly). You need to keep new plants watered, but not waterlogged.

Pruning

First prune should be in 2nd or 3rd week of March. Count from the ground up "4 eyes" and cut to an outward bud. Cut out any weak or broken branches and any crossing over. Try to end up with a clear middle. New plants for exhibition should have 3 or 4 strong stems (not easy when new).

Feeding

In late March/early April feed one handful per plant of fish, blood and bone or Q4 (I prefer Q4). You need to do this when the ground is wet or rain is due. Then mulch with at least 2" deep, two year old manure. Try to leave a 1" gap between the manure and new shoots, too deep and too close and new shoots may rot. Do not use bonemeal on its own after March. You can give one handful per plant November to March, every two years, as it stays in the soil so it is easy to overdo it.

You have to know your soil. Good drainage is important; you need to keep new plants watered, but not waterlogged, and it is worth noting that roses also take in food through their leaves. Unless you keep up the feeding you won't have large blooms through the season.



In late May feed one handful of fish, blood and bone around each plant, then in late July feed one handful of Q4 around each. Unless wet, always water in.

Try not to dig around plants. If kept moist, lots of small feeding roots will grow out from the plant and will be destroyed by prolonged dryness or digging. If the mulch was deep enough there will be few weeds, but they must be removed when seen.

There is a very old book "The Rose Expert" by Dr. D. G. Hessayon, very out of date, but it has a good section on rose care. Get hold of one (available on Amazon): it will help.

Diseases

As soon as new leaves are showing, spray with Rose Clear and every 10 days spray with "Uncle Tom's Rose Tonic" (used at the Royal National Rose Society Garden, St. Albans); this a 100% natural product. Always pick up all fallen leaves in future winters, as this helps to stop black spot. As soon as you see mildew (caused by cold nights or dry soil) soak the plants with Rose Clear and repeat again within 2 weeks. Don't remove new dark red shoots, but keep an eye on the plants for weak shoots and insect damage. Get a routine going for spraying. Spray the whole plant, under the leaves as well as this is where the insects hide.

Exhibition roses are large, high-centred and must be clean. Most insect damage occurs when the rose is tight in bud. As the bud opens the damage is noticeable, which is too late.

Varieties

Anyone can grow roses. Start with one bed of maybe three varieties and look after them. Go on the internet. There are good growers of roses. Ask "What is good for exhibiting?"

Good Starting Roses

Red – Red Devil or Loving Memory / Yellow – Tom Foster or Elina (Peaudouce)
Pink – Pink Favourite, Andrea Steltzer, Savoy Hotel, Barbara Streisand (beautifully scented).

There are lots of good roses. It's unfortunate that they have to like your soil. I've tried roses that have won, but they don't always grow well in my conditions, which is why I suggest three varieties to start. A rose will even grow well in one garden, but not just down the road. After all you are competing against the weather. If it was easy, where is the challenge?

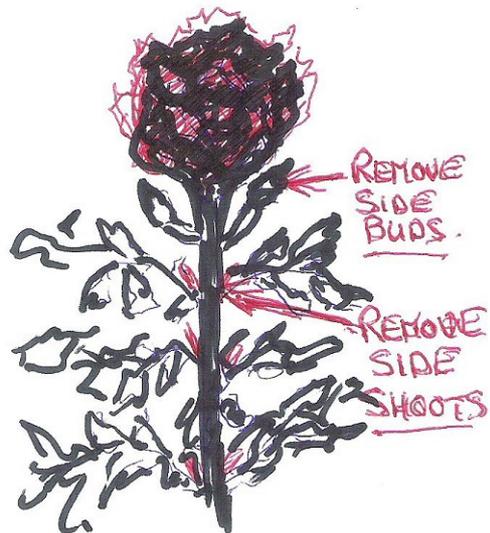
Growing in 50cm Pots

Also, I have lots of 50cm pot that grow top roses. They just need a little more food, but must never dry out. Roses in pots cannot go looking for food and water.

I put 2" of manure in the bottom with a handful of bonemeal. Fill with a 50/50 mix of compost and/or John Innes No.3 and rose, tree and shrub compost (pre-soaked). Plant, firm down and water well. Then add 1" of manure around the rose. Don't waterlog but don't let it dry out. Pots need to drain so need to be clear of the ground and will need a little extra feeding when in full growth.

Show Roses – Rosa HTs

You need all the energy going into the main bud so remove side buds and side shoots so you are left with at least 12" of usable stem as soon as large enough to handle. Take care not to damage the leaves. If you don't do this or don't feed, the second flush will have short shoots.



Again, the weather plays a part. As it has been cold this year, my second flush shoots have been too thin.

Showing for a Saturday

Cut blooms less than half open Friday am. Cut with long stems (well grown roses should have good stems and leaves). Stand in a bucket full of water and keep cool.

Saturday – take spare blooms. Try and keep stems moist and don't let blooms knock against each other. Cut oasis to fit vase and soak. Cut at least ½" off each stem to take up water. Try and keep blooms uniform. In a single bloom class get the bloom front facing. In a three bloom class try to get the top bloom 12" to 14" in height. The two other blooms need to be lower, but the same height as each other.





Showing in General

When I was learning to paint, I was told to paint trees with holes in, to let the birds fly through (not blobs). I have seen many entries at shows where the presentation has let down an otherwise good exhibit, i.e. squashed in or higgledy-piggledy. The entry needs to look uniform, with space between each bloom, not touching, but not too far apart in relation to the entry. If the blooms are good, the display could turn a 3rd into a 1st. Artistry and condition are the basis of the overall effect.



None of this should put you off showing. It's only by "having a go" that you can learn. Without exhibitors the tradition of the horticultural show will die out and, as most people have a garden which they tend, that would be a great pity.

I have been registered as partially sighted for 9 years and cannot see much for 5 months of the year but I am able to still look after my roses. Whilst my plot has been well used with 40 years of compost dug in over this time, I have personally only been growing exhibition roses for five years with great success. So if I can do it, so can you.

Rod Pengelly

Good luck and enjoy.

With thanks for the help from Bovingdon and District Horticultural Society and Dianne Prutton of Chalfont St Giles Gardens Association