

**IF**

*By: Ted W. Mills, ARS Consulting Rosarian and Judge*

During the deep economic depression of the 1930's, it fell my lot to memorize "If", the poem of the famous British writer and poet, Rudyard Kipling. This literary jewel is a collection of words that I have never forgotten. The poem is a guidebook toward understanding the issues of life.

To illustrate the degree that the word if controls our destiny, I need only to review what happened recently in my own life. Awakening at dawn in late October, I discovered that my right ear was stopped up. Thinking it was from the slight cold I had contracted, I waited a week before seeking medical help. To my surprise, the resulting examination revealed that a light stroke had occurred and my hearing was reduced to only one ear being operative. And what was the doctor's statement to me? "Ted, if you had come to me within 48 hours of the attack, we could have possibly restored your hearing." That placed the word if into its real perspective.

As I prepared this article on roses, my mind kept pondering the words in "If" so skillfully written by old Rudyard. I don't think he would object to my plagiarizing his title and relating those two letters to the science of growing roses.

Admittedly, there are two ways to express the results of this momentous two-letter word. I prefer to approach the subject in a positive fashion. Dwelling on the good results will be more palatable to the reader. In other words, something worthwhile will occur if...

Let's begin. If we set our minds to raising good roses, successful growing will more likely occur. It all starts with attitude and if our game plan comes from the heart as well as the head, our goal will be reachable. Once this positive mental attitude is established, we are well on the way to success if... we follow it with dedicated horticultural activity.

Now that we have established a firm foundation for our article, it is time to address the several issues that spell successful rose growing. How many times have you heard this: "Only if I had done this or if I had done that, things would have been different. Let's investigate what this has to do with roses. For illustration purposes I will allow myself to be the culprit in this treatise.

First to the selection of a planting site. If I had chosen a place that provided six hours of sunlight and good drainage, the roses would have flourished. If I had planted the bushes away from encroaching tree roots, my roses would have enjoyed the "meals" I had generously provided.

In my haste to obtain rose plants I sacrificed quality in search of bargains. The corner fruit stand's plants were half the cost of the garden center bushes. If I had only followed the instructions graciously given me by the local rose society C/R, the weak plants I struggle to keep alive would never fallen my lot. I had been told there is a wealth of rose culture information provided by the American Rose Society and its 365 local rose societies. If I had only taken the time to investigate these sources, my labor would not have been in vain. I would have avoided unnecessary mistakes in plant selection and many other aspects of rose growing.

And now what about the planting site? I thought that by simply placing the bush's roots in a freshly dug hole, then covering the roots with the resultant soil, things would work out for themselves. After all, weeds grow with vigor without very much attention. No need to add to the soil that the Creator furnished. The rains will come and the apparently good soil will push the rose

to a healthy state. My supposition proved wrong. **If I had only thought to amend the ill-nourished soil with composted materials and a dose of organics my rose bushes would have had a jump -start toward producing award-winning blooms. Then too, for the sake of time, my planting hole was dug shallow, thereby squeezing the root system to a very confined state. If I had only provided the bush ample root space it would have performed much better.**

When feeding time came I felt that I had already given the bush a start and no additional fertilizer would be necessary. How wrong I was for harboring that supposition. **If I had just realized that, like my own diet, food needed to be supplied with regularity to sustain healthy growth. If I had just gone to the feed bag more often my roses would enjoy a nourished lifestyle. To give them regular feeding would ensure that these beauties would perform at their best. If I had only had a soil test I would have known that the soil was deficient in life -sustaining elements. And even if I had supplied the vital nutrients, if I had known the pH factor was out-of-kilter, my fertilizing labor would not have been in vain.**

My roses were doing well and suddenly diseases and insects came calling. Powdery mildew, dreaded blackspot, and spider mites are feasting on my prized blooms and foliage. **If I had only heeded the advice of the local C/R and preventively sprayed prescribed chemicals on a regular schedule, this onslaught would not have occurred. Next time I will obey the experienced growers and follow their sound instruction.**

Rose show time has arrived and excitement prevails. **If I had not pruned too early and had timed this important activity correctly, the Spring bloom cycle would not have arrived one week early. A call to a C/R would have prevented this from happening since this knowledge is basic to the experienced exhibitor. If I had only investigated, my Queen would not be left in the garden, fully blown, rather than enjoying a scenario of royalty at the local rose show.**

There are many other **ifs** that I could recite but for the sake of brevity I will conclude by mentioning a couple more that must bear repeating. **If I had not depended solely on nature to provide life-giving water, my roses would not have suffered so greatly. If I had not kept repeating the procrastinating statement: "Oh, why bother, it will rain tomorrow for sure." Believe me, watering is one operation that cannot be denied the plants. Take heed, if nothing else is provided the rose bushes, water will mean their survival.**

The final **ifs** that come to mind are two that will ensure added pleasure to rose growing. **If I share my horticultural "secrets" with fellow rosarians, this great hobby will spread in popularity and its survival will be ensured. And better still, if I share my roses with other people, particularly the infirmed shut-ins, then rose growing will remain popular with me and I will feel better about it. The reward is immeasurable in a spiritual sense.**

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