

MARCH MAINTENANCE

By: Jimmy Moser, ARS Judge and Consulting Rosarian

This season's bad weather and rain has caused us to be a little late in our spring pruning and fertilization program. But have no fear! Spring is a' coming and there will be a lot to do in a short time. The roses will catch up — if the rain stops and the sun ever shines again.

Pruning: I usually start my spring pruning when the forsythia begins to bloom. When pruning, be sure to cut to a bud eye at white pith. You can seal the cut canes with Elmer's Glue, fingernail polish or orange shellac. The sealing of the canes prevents cane borers from boring holes, which causes damage or loss of the cane.

Fertilizing: Now is the time to fertilize your **established bushes**. For each hybrid tea I use one to two cups of organics (cottonseed meal, fish meal, blood meal, alfalfa pellets or a combination of these mixed). Mills Magic is a good ready-mixed formula of these ingredients.

Next, I apply three tablespoons of urea or ammonia nitrate plus three tablespoons of Epsom salts. I scratch this into the soil and water thoroughly. On top of this, I tear down the hills of winter protection. This puts most of the mulch in place for the summer.

Removing Winter Protection: It should be safe to remove the winter protection from around the bushes now. However, it will not hurt to leave it in place longer. Be careful when removing the soil mounds as new tender growth is very easy to break. You might want to wash the mounds down with a stream of water.

Spraying: When leaves begin to grow on the bushes, it is time to start a spray program. I suggest beginning with Funginex or Immunox in combination with Manab or Mancozeb (same product). Apply one tablespoon each per gallon of water. Remember that prevention is the key. Trying to regain control after a disease outbreak is difficult.

Planting New Roses: Newly ordered **bare-root rose bushes** will be arriving soon. I recommend dipping the new bush in a solution of one cup of bleach diluted in a five-gallon bucket of water. The bleach disinfects any crown gall disease or other bacteria that might be lingering on the bush. After the bleach dip, soak the roots overnight in water with some root stimulator added. If you do not have a root stimulator, use half strength Miracle-Gro instead. Half strength Miracle-Gro is 1/2 tablespoon to a gallon of water.

When planting a new bare-root bush and after digging the hole, mound soil in the bottom of the hole. Spread the roots out on top of the mound. Next add super phosphate to the hole forming a band around the mounded soil. (Superphosphate and bone meal are the same product.) Cover the bush with soil beginning at the roots and eventually covering the entire bush including canes. Leave about 1/2 inch of cane exposed above ground. Covering the entire bush with soil prevents the canes from drying out. As new growth begins to appear, gradually use a gentle stream of water to wash the soil away from the canes.

Do not begin fertilizing **newly planted bushes** until they are leafed out. Once leafed out, use 1/2 strength Miracle-Gro (1/2 tablespoon to one gallon of water) initially and gradually strengthen the formula until the bush gets established and begins to grow.

Next month we will discuss a feeding program and how to get ready for a rose show. Some of you may want to exhibit roses in the Memphis Rose Society's annual Mother's Day Rose Show on May 11.