

Essentials for Vigorous Roses by Monty Justice

So you have roses and they are not performing the way you would like, or you want to have a NEW ROSE GARDEN next year. What are the essentials to have vigorous, disease free roses? Now that's a tough question to answer in just a few paragraphs, but let's give it a go!

Rose Types:

1. Hybrid Teas, Grandifloras, Floribundas, Minis, Mini-floras, Climbers, David Austin and most shrub roses require protective spraying.
2. Knock Out and its counterparts and Earth-Kind varieties do not require protective spraying.

For this writing I am addressing how to care for those types in #1 above.

Location

Twenty yards or more away from the roots of shade trees. Morning sun, afternoon shade preferred optimum 6 to 8 hours of sun.

NEW BED PLANTING

1. Dig a hole 10 to 12 inches wide and 15 to 20 inches deep with a post hole digger or shovel. Throw the dirt away.
2. Fill with potting mix, the less peat moss the better.
3. Install rose with the crown or bud union below ground level.
4. Apply a slow release fertilizer on top of the hole. (1/3 cup of 14-14-14- and a cup of alfalfa if you have it)
5. Water in good using about a gallon. It may be best not to use a liquid plant food until the rose has leaves.
6. Apply a 2 inch wood bark mulch.

Maintenance:

1. Watering - apply on top of hole about a gallon each week. Better results if 1/2 gallon, two times a week. Or even better, 1/4th gallon four times a week. It's not the amount of water but the frequency. Keep the top two inches of the medium constantly moist.
2. Protective spraying - Obtain an all purpose rose spray from your local garden center and use according to directions. Always water thru the leaves and apply to soil before spraying to prevent burning the leaves. I also add to this pesticide, 1 tablespoon Epsom salts, 2 tablespoons vinegar and 1/2 teaspoon of my plant food to each gallon of spray mixture.
3. Disease control for blackspot and mildew. Pesticides are basically "preventive" measures not "curative". Therefore, remove leaves that have disease or no longer are green as soon as it is noticed. It takes 8 hours of moisture for disease spores to adhere to the leaves, therefore washing thru the foliage with water is a good thing in hot weather if it dries before nightfall.

Spider mite control - wash off the underside of leaves closest to the ground at least weekly with a hard water spray when daytime temperatures reach the mid 80's F. (usually late May).

Note: Most rose sprays contain both insecticide and fungicide protection.

If you have only a few roses the following all natural spray is very good:

In one gallon of water, add the following:

1 tablespoon baking soda

2 1/2 tablespoons light vegetable oil (Canola)

Since oil and water don't readily mix, agitate constantly while trying to hit the underside of each leaf, particularly those closest to the ground. Do this weekly and after a heavy rain.

Pruning:

Now I could write all day on this, but your experience will teach you how to "prune with a purpose".

1. At the end of the FIRST bloom cycle (usually early June), do not cut long stems to enjoy in the house, instead do not remove more than 20% of the stems and leaves or it will not be able to replenish its energy from the sun and start to grow again for several weeks.

I prefer to enjoy the blooms in the garden or cut short stems to float in a bowl and "dead head" weary blooms left on the plant by twisting them off with your fingers, not removing any foliage. You will have more stems and blooms the rest of the year by doing this.

2. After the first bloom cycle and the energy has been replenished by the sun's rays hitting the leaves, new purplish red growth will appear. The darker the color and the longer it lasts before changing to green, the more vigorous the plant. Also, you will not get blackspot on leaves until it changes to green.

At this stage (mid to late June) and for the rest of the season, you may cut (remove) as much stem and leaves because the rule for pruning now is "The more you take off the plant, the more vigorous the plant becomes to replace with new growth". Remove stems smaller than a pencil; those that did not produce a bloom; diseased, cross-over or unwanted growth at any time after the new stems start to grow for the second bloom cycle.

At the end of the season (two good freezes or after Thanksgiving) the plants are sufficiently dormant to move (bareroot) to another location and or prune to knee high height, again removing twiggy, damaged and unwanted stems. This can be done anytime after dormancy but before new growth in the spring. We do not prune climbers, David Austin or shrub roses until after they bloom the following spring. Spring pruning removes any stems damaged by winter. This will appear as a tan pith of the stem rather than creamy color (healthy). We want the energy stored over winter in the plant to produce new growth from only healthy stems. This may mean that you need to cut off stems into the mulch! Don't be afraid, do this. The results will be rewarding.

Mulching:

Two inches of any woody material twice a year - after the first bloom cycle, put a barrier of two inch mulch between the ground and plant to reduce blackspot spores from coming into contact with the rose plant. The second time is after the plants are dormant. Mulch controls moisture, weeds to some extent, soil temperature, and disease. During the growing season, roots don't reach out when soil temperatures don't go below 70 degrees F. at night and therefore, no new growth starts. We want the soil to remain cold in the early spring and the plants to remain dormant. It takes two inches of a woody material to do this hopefully until the first week of April. Aged manure is a very good substitute.

Fertilizing:

Roses are heavy feeders. At least a monthly feeding. Even better to apply on a weekly or bi-monthly basis. A dry balanced (10-10-10) formula in the spring and (5-10-15) as

the air temperatures and soils warm. Liquid fertilizers that are effective foliarly are excellent additions to your feeding program. Also, trace minerals (dry or liquid) will yield improved quality and health. If your plants are growing in soil, make the roots reach to get the food by applying it as far as you can away from the rose center up to three feet. The further the roots reach out to get the food the bigger, stronger the stems, leaves and blooms become.

EXISTING BED RENOVATION:

Although water and sunshine are very important to most every plant's growth, there is another factor of equal or greater importance. AIR SPACES (pore spaces in the soil or medium where the roots are. THERE IS NO TOP GROWTH WITHOUT ROOT GROWTH. Roots reach out between the particles of soil where there is air. If these "spaces" are small or filled with anything other than oxygen (water, other gases) little or no plant vigor results. That's why I plant in potting mix.

So to create the conditions for vigorous roses, one must maintain a porous soil. You can do this by inserting a spade or fork (anytime of the growing season to full depth 8 to 12 inches into the ground) about the drip line or one and one half feet from the plant. Do not face the blade towards the plant or it will cut off roots. Insert the blade into the ground like the spokes on a wheel where the hub is the rose center, bend the handle back until the ground cracks. Back up a few inches and repeat until you have gone completely around the rose. Put your plant food on the broken ground area and water in. The roots can now reach out and new vigor will soon be evident.

I've been doing "Rose Care" for home owners, selecting the roses, planting and maintaining them for over twenty years. As a "Consulting Rosarian" (a designation the American Rose Society gives to folks like me who have made lots of mistakes but learned a little bit). There is no fee for my advice. I welcome your calls and questions and leave you with this thought...A rose, touched by the sun's warm rays, all its petals slowly doth unfurl. So you when touched by God's great mercy and grace, let joy and gladness fill your soul.