

THE BEGINNING ROSARIAN

April—A Time to Plant

By Glenda Whitaker

“There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven.”

—Ecclesiastes 3:1

So here are some rose garden times for us to consider:

A time to plant and a time to transplant

A time to uproot (shovel prune) and a time to clear away

A time to form a garden and a time to renew

A time for growth and a time to care for that growth with sun, water, and nutrients

A time to be surprised and a time to enjoy one's toil

A time to cut and a time to arrange those cuttings

A time to share and a time to be thankful.

“I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God.”

— Ecclesiastes 3:12,13

Each of us is a partner with God in our gardening, in the placement of our plants as a beginning. Knowing roses need at least 4-6 hours of good sun, think in terms of location, location, location (preferably morning sun if that is possible since the morning sun helps dry the dew first thing to help prevent black spot or mildew from taking hold). We have learned from experience that an elevated bed of good loose soil mix helps to insure good drainage, or even a slight incline that gives natural drainage. Digging the planting holes at least 18” deep by 18” wide – or even 20”-24” depending on size of root system, allows room for those anchor roots to go deep and feeder roots to spread horizontally. I have a shovel with a serrated blade that I purchased from Beaty Fertilizer, one of our very faithful vendors, that can make cutting into clay soil much easier.

Another favorite tool is a long tined hay fork that is good for keeping soil loose throughout the season. The long tines can go deep around the drip line of the rose bush (where the outer branches of the bush extend). Use a rocking motion with the fork to “open the pores” for better fertilizer reception, as well as allowing the watering to go “whoosh” down to those feeder roots. Unless one plans to till a whole bed, a good wheelbarrow is a must for mixing perlite, peat moss, and some aged organic material together with the soil dug from individual planting holes. With a good loose medium, you are now ready to plant those new rose bushes. This is also an excellent time to transplant a bush that may not have done well in its former location. Your garden is a thing of beauty where color combinations, height considerations and background should be noted for aesthetic purposes. By all means, those weak plants that suffered through the last two or three years should be cleared away for a new start.

April is the time to complete the pruning of hybrid teas and grandifloras, getting down to clean, white pith in the cross section of the stems. Remember the rose has woody stems, so that center pith should be solid, not spongy. Stems of at least pencil thickness should be retained, especially in younger plants, thickening as the bush ages. I have been guilty of shocking a plant by pruning too hard, so give the bush a little leeway when it comes to looking for pure white pith in the stem. A little brown will not hurt short term and can be pruned back later when the plant has time to put on good spring growth. Do prune damaged, bruised canes, for these become susceptible to fungus diseases, promoting black spot. Spraying a fungicide at the first sign of leaf growth will help ward off disease. Spray the canes and surrounding ground to kill any fungal spores that might be over wintering.

Climbers should not be pruned until after their spring bloom. Many climbers bloom on “old” wood – last year's growth, so do not lose that beautiful bloom. Train the limbs of the climbers in a horizontal fashion as much as possible for maximum laterals to grow and produce more blooms. Of course, any dead canes can be cut out at anytime.

Floribundas, polyanthas, and shrubs will require very little pruning – mainly just removing any dead or damaged canes.

A good organic fertilizer and a general “once a season” fertilizer such as Osmocote or Bloomcote applied mid to late April will give good coverage for growth. As the rains come and your own supplemental watering, these long acting fertilizers are released into the root system. Liquid fertilizers can be used throughout the season to give any extra boost desired.

If our weather cooperates, surprises will greet your eye every day in May and beyond. Cut short stems on those blooms in early spring to give the bush a chance to advance. Since our annual rose show will be in cooperation with the Tenarky District Convention at Cheekwood Oct. 4th, there is plenty of time to prove the success of your toil.

Plan, Plant, Prune, Feed, Water, Cut, Enjoy. And be thankful!