

WAY TO GROW

Way to Grow in Orinda
Rose Care Tips and Tricks – Getting the Most from Your Roses

Steve & Cathy Lambert



Last February, we wrote our first in a series of articles about roses. That article focused primarily on the different classifications of roses and how to choose the right rose for your Orinda garden. This article will provide you with some rose-care tips and tricks for getting the most from your roses.

We have planted all sorts of rose gardens for Orinda homeowners, from the very formal to a mixed perennial border with roses to just a few accent roses scattered throughout a yard. No matter the extent of your rose garden you should demand and expect the most from your roses. We believe a well-cared-for rose bush should provide you with arms-full of blooms as early and late in the year as the weather will allow. We have developed a diligent care and feeding schedule, and a few shortcuts, to achieve optimum bloom for your roses. Even the most novice gardeners should be able to follow these guidelines and achieve great results.

Choosing and Planting Your Roses

The most common way to purchase roses used to be in bare-root form. These are unpotted roses with the roots packed in a bag full of saw dust. Lately, these are becoming harder to find. More nurseries are potting their roses as soon as they arrive from the grower. If you prefer to buy your roses in bare-root form you can still do so at stores like Orchard Supply Hardware and Home Depot. You can also purchase bare-root roses through mail order catalogs or online through companies like Jackson & Perkins or Carlton Roses.

Whether you purchase your roses potted or bare-root always look for roses rated #1 Grade to get the best results. Choose roses with three to four thick stems. The stem thickness you want is comparable to that of a toddler-sized crayon.

Dig a hole about 16 to 18 inches wide, depending on the size of your root ball, and about 16 inches deep. Next, mix your soil amendment with some of the native soil that you just removed from the hole at a 50/50 ratio. We used to prepare our own special planting amendment for roses. Now you can purchase excellent quality, commercially prepared rose planting mixes at high-end nurseries like McDonnell's Nursery in Orinda or Orchard Nursery in Lafayette. Refill your hole about 1/3 of the way to the top with your 50/50 blend.

Before placing your rose in the hole, gently spread out the root ball shaking off some of the dirt with your fingers. You want to place your rose so that the bud union (the first branching-out of the stems above the root ball) is three inches above the dirt. Keep in mind that your soil mixture will compact a little after planting.

Mulching Your Roses

The most common reason that people use mulch is to help control weed growth. Mulching has many other benefits. It conserves water and provides valuable organic nutrients to the roots as water travels through the mulch. Mulching shades the soil from the sun and protects small feeder roots growing at or near the surface. Mulching also makes it easier to add granular fertilizers without disturbing the soil and roots.

We use and recommend my own mulch blend. This blend includes alfalfa (which adds alcohol tricontanol to the soil, providing shine to your rose leaves and helping new buds to break), chicken manure with a nitrogen rate of 1.5 percent, scoria (dust and small particles of red lava rock) which add valuable rock phosphates to the soil as it breaks down. Then top this mixture with a black fir bark. This mulch blend can be placed as high as four inches above the soil, but should not cover the bud union (graft). You can also purchase a store-bought rose amendment to use as your mulch, because it contains many of the same ingredients listed above.

Watering Your Roses

Although many rose experts recommend a drip system for watering your roses, we find that most roses don't respond well to drip irrigation. The main reason experts recommend drip versus overhead watering is because many of the diseases that could attack your roses prefer wet leaves. Our solution to this watering contradiction is to use low-angled spray heads and set your timer to water in the early morning. This watering practice provides an even source of water to the root zone while bringing with it fertilizers and organic nutrients. Watering early in the morning will also allow plenty of time for the leaves to dry.

Pruning Your Roses

More than any other landscape plant, roses require proper pruning. Whole

chapters in rose care guides have been dedicated to proper rose pruning. What follows are the key rules to remember when pruning your roses.

In our climate, dormant rose pruning should be done between Super Bowl Sunday and Valentine's Day. Remember – don't give your sweetheart a valentine until you've pruned your roses. Begin by removing all the unhealthy "dead" wood and then all the twiggy growth. Unless the bush has very few healthy canes, we recommend removing all growth with a diameter of less than a pencil's thickness. Also, remove all inward-facing buds. Next, remove the oldest cane at the bud union. This should encourage the shrub to produce several new canes. Examine the bush and choose four to seven strong, healthy canes and prune these by at least half of their length. Don't worry if you have fewer than four strong canes. Prune however many you have using this advice and your rose will re-grow many more strong canes.

We prune all our roses down to 12 to 18 inches in height. This harsh treatment is rewarded with armfuls of beautiful full blossoms upon the next bloom. Many hybrids demand this type of harsh pruning. These vigorous roses include: Brandy, Double Delight, Rio Samba, Peace, Ingrid Bergman, French Perfume, and others. Other roses, with less pruning, will be a good landscape-show rose as well. Lastly,

always cut 1/4 inch above an outward facing bud union (preferably after a second five-leaflet set) and cut at an angle not exceeding 45 degrees. Make sure the leaflet you cut above is outward facing, as this is where the new bud will form. Always remember the "pencil thickness" rule to avoid having a new rose stem form where its base is not strong enough to support it.

Fertilizing Your Roses

Let us begin with a general introduction on fertilizers and NPK. N (the first letter) stands for nitrogen, which is the most important growth stimulant. Nitrogen also helps in forming the chlorophyll and nutrient uptake. P (the second letter) stands for phosphorus, which stimulates root and flower formation. Phosphorus also aids plants in the conversion of starches to sugar. K (the third letter) is potassium or potash, which is important for the growth and development of stems and leaves, while also increasing the plant's resistance to disease.

We ordinarily begin feeding our roses the first week in March. Fortunately, for those of us living in the East Bay, that's when the winter weather is usually behind us. You may find it helpful to make the following notations in your 2007 calendar.

March: During the first week of March, get your rose plants off to a quick start by

[SEE GROW page 22]



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