

## STEP-BY-STEP Caring for Roses in the Summer

By Rosalie H. Davis

In the Fall, I gently pack earth over the vulnerable graft unions of my rosebushes to protect them from ensuing bitter weather. In winter, I put up with their gawky, thorny figures shadowing the snow at the back of the garden; in spring, I prune them. And in summer, when I enjoy them the most, with their arching new stems laden with fragrant blooms, I must still care for them.

A string of scorching summer days, though it may not kill a rose, can close the year's show of flowers early if one forgets to water. Fertile, slightly acid to neutral, well-drained soil is as good for weeds as it is for roses. Cool, damp weather can quickly turn a touch of powdery mildew into a plague of biblical proportions. Good weather, on the other hand, brings out whole squadrons of earwigs to feast on tender petals; dry spells encourage mites. And, in summer, roses need grooming, if not pruning.

Well-planted, well-tended cultivars chosen to suit your own garden and climate are not nearly as likely to develop problems as are carelessly planted and ill-kept roses. The allies of roses are fresh air, sunlight, and good companions. An edging around the bed and mulch within will keep down weeds, and the mulch will preserve moisture as well. Pests and diseases may not get as out of hand if roses are mingled with other flowers; 'King Henry' and 'Helen Mount' violas make charming groundcovers under white and light-yellow roses, for instance.

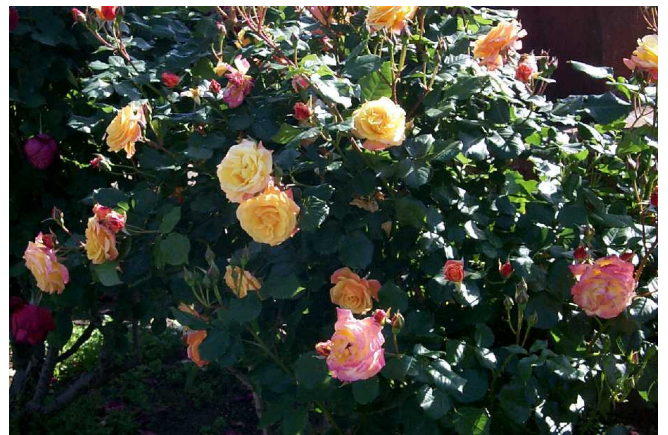
Choose hardy and disease-resistant species and cultivars. In my Zone 6 Massachusetts garden, for instance, 'Queen Elizabeth' (a medium-pink grand flora introduced in the 1950s) has resisted the fungus that infects my turn-of-the-century rugosa 'Sir Thomas Lipton' in June. Aphids, however, favor 'Q.E.'. 'Garden Party' (1959), a white hybrid tea, seems to have everything; it's cold-hardy and has thus far fended off both fungus and insect attacks in my garden.

The American Rose Society annually publishes a helpful "Handbook for Selecting Roses," which lists hundreds of roses available today. It gives name, type, and color, and ranks their overall performance. After establishing whether a cultivar would be hardy in your zone, look for roses that have some high marks from the A.R.S. - 'Queen Elizabeth' was given a 9.1 on their 10-point scale, an deservedly so, for it resists even black spot, one of the worst scourges of roses.

Don't plant roses near large trees; the trees will win the battle for water. Roses need sunlight (though many perform quite well in half sun) and good air circulation so that foliage can dry quickly. Mulch roses with a light, organic material like shredded bark to preserve moisture, keep down weeds, and keep the shrubs clean. Funguses and soil-borne diseases can splash up on plants during watering or heavy rain - the mulch will reduce such soiling of stems and leaves.

And when organic mulches break down, they nourish the soil as well. (I fertilize my roses in spring, when I feed the rest of the garden, with a moderate dose of the high-potash organic fertilizer Electra.)

1. In many climates roses need watering during dry spells. Certain roses are more drought-hardy than others. (Rugosa roses, known in New England as "beach roses," do well in sandy soil that doesn't hold moisture well; shore-dwelling friends have said the same of 'Betty Prior', a single floribunda.) Water roses deeply. If the soil surface is cool and damp there is no need to water.



Shallow watering may lay the dust, but it does not encourage deep, healthy rooting. Soak the ground to minimize splash, or water early in the day to allow the leaves to be dry by night. (Funguses thrive in cool, dank conditions.) If spider mites are your problem, however, an overhead stream of cold water will send them packing. Roses need moisture in summer, especially to keep ever blooming, long-flowering, and remontant (twice-blooming) ones in flower, but they must have good drainage. If your soil tends to waterlog, build raised beds. If it is heavy in clay, add sand, peat moss, and compost to improve its texture. If your soil is sandy, add organic materials to make it spongier.

2. Prune roses in spring, as a rule (climbers are the main exception), but keep them trimmed in summer. Always take out diseased, damaged, or dead growth wherever you find it, pruning back to live growth; white wood is healthy wood. Wounds can be dressed with a thin film of paraffin or grafting wax to preserve moisture on the cut cane and thus speed the growth of callus, the equivalent of scar tissue on plants. Deadhead spent blooms and flowers that do not open (the latter are victims of bud-balling, a misfortune brought on by dampness). With roses that bloom only once or are not grown for cutting (I include species, shrub roses, ramblers, and climbers), be especially vigilant with deadheading to make the most of their bloom. If you are growing these roses for their bright winter hips, of course you shouldn't deadhead them; simply remove infested or diseased flowers and hips in summer to maintain a healthy shrub. Remove suckers that start up from the rootstock, below the graft union. If you're not sure where the graft union is, inspect the base of the plant; the leaves of the suckers usually look different from those of the flowering graft.



3. When it comes to crawling pest, pick off and destroy all the marauders you can. If you're squeamish, try traps and sticky bars before resorting to sprays that are highly toxic to humans. Soap and water will deter some insects. And, before using any pesticide, consider that many do not discriminate between garden offenders and good citizens; beneficial insects like honeybees and ladybugs will suffer for the crimes of earwigs and Japanese beetles. Some slug and snail baits harm songbirds. Moreover, in hot sun pesticides can damage foliage – a matter of concern to every gardener, organic and otherwise. If you must use them, always start out with pesticides of lower toxicity, like rotenone, or sprays formulated to kill specific bugs. Don't spray potent insecticides merely to prevent attacks – insect plagues can often be squelched by a single counterattack, or two. A regular spray schedule of a powerful fungicide, on the other hand, may be the only way to control powdery mildew if all else has failed. "Double-whammy" pesticides, made especially for roses, are available; these kill insects and fungus at one fell swoop-but why use them unless you have both insect and fungus pests? Remember that any spray should cover the undersides of leaves as well; use equipment designed to do this.

4. Gather your roses while they are still in bud, but after the collar of sepals below the bud has relaxed. Cut stems with a sharp knife or clippers, making a long, angled cut. Early morning and late afternoon are good times for cutting. To ensure more flowers, leave two to three sets of leaflets (an odd number of leaflets, between 3 and 17, makes up a compound rose leaf). Depending on the size of your collection, the kind of roses, and how they are planted, you may be more concerned with the length of the cut flower than the look of the plundered shrub. It may be more important to have a long, elegant stem for an arrangement of perfect proportion. However, by doing so you may nig off buds that would flower late; my 'Queen Elizabeth' threw her last bouquet on the first of November last year.

