



ROSES

Psst. Over here, I've got free-range rabbit droppings. Makes a great fertiliz...No, no—try my alfalfa tea. Contains 53 micro-nutrien... These new pruners have a laser guided site and a proximity sensor to...



Who wouldn't love an arbor overflowing with roses like this one?

At times nothing seems more mysterious than growing roses. Everyone seems to have his or her own opinions and methods, which they are more than happy to share with you. All of which may make a novice rose grower throw up their hands in despair. Calm down, take a deep breath and let's look at some basics.

Roses need sun. There's no getting around it. You need a spot in the garden with a minimum of 6 hours of full sun. Oh, there are lists of roses for shade but if you read closely you will often see the word tolerate. I can tolerate below freezing temperatures, but I'm happier when it's 70 degrees. Some profuse blooming roses will tolerate 4 to 5 hours of sun and still give a few blooms, but they're happier with more sun.

Roses need water. Well, this is no surprise. Roses prefer about

an inch of water a week. Don't assume that 3-inch June down-pour will average out with those 3 dry weeks in July. Roses like moisture evenly supplied throughout the growing season. Hey! Turn off that sprinkler system. Water on the foliage promotes disease problems, so water the root area. A time saving method is to use a soaker hose. After you're done with that, spread some mulch around your roses to help retain moisture and keep weeds down.

Roses need food. They're hungry. It takes a lot of energy to push those flowers out all season. A general-purpose 10-10-10 fertilizer is fine, or use a specially blended rose fertilizer. For repeat bloomers, fertilize as the foliage emerges, again in mid-June, and once more in mid to late July. Don't apply any fertilizer after August 15. This might cause new growth that

would be easily damaged in winter. If this seems like too much bother, get a special slow release fertilizer. Organic versus inorganic? The choice is yours. I don't believe it matters to your rose at all.

Soil preparation. If you're lucky, you have soil that is the perfect blend of inorganic and organic material, proper pore space and a pH of 6.8. If you do, please buy me a lottery ticket. If your soil is like modeling clay when it's wet and concrete when it's dry, then you need to add organic matter. This is one of the MOST IMPORTANT things you can do to grow roses successfully. Look back at that sentence. Those are capital letters. Gardeners will argue passionately about peat vs. mushroom compost; homemade vs. store-bought; preparing an entire bed vs. digging individual holes. The important thing is to loosen the soil as deeply as your back can take and add some kind of organic matter. How much? It would be hard to add too much. Two to four inches spread over the top and worked in is a good place to start. If you rent a tiller, go for the big one. That little one will likely just skitter wildly on top of your rock hard soil.

Planting and Protection: Roses are commonly available as container grown plants. Many times these plants may have only been potted 2-3 months. Rather than grabbing the plant and pulling it out (Ouch! Honey, these things have thorns!) you may want to cut off the bottom of the pot, set it in your hole, slit the sides and remove the pot. Many hybrid tea (one flower per stem) and floribunda (many flowers per stem) roses are grafted. Most shrub roses are not. Grafted means the rose you want is above that lump you see at the base of your plant and below that is the root of another rose.

In fall after a couple of hard frosts you'll want to pile on 10 to 12 inches of loose mulch that can be held in place with a collar of wire

mesh. Remove the mulch gradually in spring as temperatures warm. Shrub roses, which are generally hardier, require at most a good layer of mulch around the base for winter protection.



Pruning: Whole articles, if not books, have been written on this subject. I refer you to them. Some basics: Shrub roses—cut out any dead wood in spring and prune to shape. That's it.

Hybrid tea and Floribundas—In fall, shorten the canes to make your winter protection easier but save your hard pruning for spring.

In summer, unless you're cutting them to put in a vase, try this. Instead of deadheading by cutting above a 5-leaflet leaf, just snip off below the spent flower. You'll probably have more (but smaller) flowers with less down time.

Armed with your new knowledge, don't sneak into your local garden center, sidle up to their rose expert and squeak out, "I've never grown roses before." Stride boldly in, look them in the eye and proclaim, "I'm going to grow a rose."

