

# GROWING ROSES

## HOW TO PLANT, GROW, AND CARE FOR ROSES



*Pixabay*

**Rose bushes** come in a variety of forms, from climbing roses to miniature rose plants, blooming mainly in early summer and fall. One way to group roses into classes is according to their date of introduction:

- **Old roses**—also called “old-fashioned roses” and “heirloom roses”—are those introduced prior to 1867. These are the lush, invariably fragrant roses found in old masters’ paintings. There are hundreds of old rose varieties—whose hardiness varies—providing choices for both warm and mild climates.
- **Modern hybrid roses** are sturdy, long-blooming, extremely hardy and disease-resistant, and bred for color, shape, size, and fragrance.
- **Species, or wild roses**, are those that have been growing wild for many thousands of years. These wild roses have been adapted to modern gardens and usually bloom in the spring.

Choosing from all the possibilities can be a daunting task. Take your time and wander through nurseries and page through mail-order catalogs and websites.

### PLANTING

#### Preparing the Soil

- Roses prefer a near-neutral pH range of 5.5–7.0. A pH of 6.5 is just about right for most home gardens (slightly acidic to neutral).
- An accurate [soil test](#) will tell you where your pH currently stands. Acidic (sour) soil is counteracted by applying finely ground limestone, and alkaline (sweet) soil is treated with ground sulfur.
- Before you plant, be sure that you choose varieties proven in your climate. When in doubt, All-America Rose Selections winners are good bets. Or check with a local nursery or [Cooperative Extension Service](#).



## Ordering Plants

- If you order roses from a mail-order company, order early, in January or February (March at the latest). They are usually shipped in the spring as bare roots when plants are fully dormant, well before they have leafed out. They'll look like a bundle of sticks on arrival. Note that they are not dead—simply dormant.
- If you are buying container-grown roses (vs. bare-root roses), plant them by May or early June for best results.

## Planting Tips

- Plant roses where they will receive a minimum of 5 to 6 hours of full sun per day. Roses grown in weak sun may not die at once, but they weaken gradually. Give them plenty of organic matter when planting and don't crowd them.
- Wear sturdy gloves to protect your hands from prickly thorns. Have a hose or bucket of water and all your planting tools nearby. Keep your bare-root rose in water until you are ready to place it in the ground.
- Roses can be cut back and moved in either spring or fall, but not in midsummer, as they might suffer and die in the heat. Large rose canes can be cut back by as much as two thirds, and smaller ones to within 6 to 12 inches of the ground.
- When you transplant your roses, be sure to dig a much bigger hole than you think you need (for most types, the planting hole should be about 15 to 18 inches wide) and add plenty of organic matter such as [compost](#) or aged manure.
- Some old-timers recommend placing a 4-inch square of gypsum wallboard and a 16-penny nail in the hole to provide calcium and iron, both appreciated by roses.

## CARE

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### Watering Roses

- Diligently water your roses. Soak the entire root zone at least twice a week in dry summer weather. Avoid frequent shallow sprinklings, which won't reach the deeper roots and may encourage fungus. Roses do best with 90 inches of rain per year, so unless you live in a rain forest, water regularly.
- Roses love water—but don't drown them. That is, they don't like to sit in water, and they'll die if the soil is too wet in winter. The ideal soil is rich and loose, with good drainage. One of the worst mistakes you can make is to not provide adequate drainage.
- Use mulch. To help conserve water, reduce stress, and encourage healthy growth, apply a 2- to 4-inch layer of chopped and shredded leaves, grass clippings, or shredded bark around the base of your roses. Allow about an inch of space between the mulch and the base stem of the plant.





## Feeding Roses

- Feed roses on a regular basis before and throughout the blooming cycle (avoid chemical fertilizers and pesticides if you're harvesting for the kitchen).
- Once a month between April and July, apply a balanced granular fertilizer (5-10-5 or 5-10-10). Allow  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 cup for each bush, and sprinkle it around the drip line, not against the stem.
- In May and June, scratch in an additional tablespoon of Epsom salts along with your fertilizer; the magnesium sulfate will encourage new growth from the bottom of the bush.

## Pruning Roses

- Prune roses every spring and destroy all old or diseased plant material. Wear elbow-length gloves that are thick enough to protect your hands from thorns or a clumsy slip, but flexible enough to allow you to hold your tools. Always wear safety goggles; branches can whip back when released.
- Start with pruning shears for smaller growth. Use loppers, which look like giant, long-handle shears, for growth that is more than half an inch thick. A small pruning saw is handy, as it cuts on both the push and the pull.
- Deadhead religiously and keep beds clean. Every leaf has a growth bud, so removing old flower blossoms encourages the plant to make more flowers instead of using the energy to make seeds. Clean away from around the base of the rosebushes any trimmed debris that can harbor [disease and insects](#).
- Late in the season, stop deadheading rugosas so that hips will form on the plants; these can be harvested and dried on screens, away from sunlight, then stored in an airtight container. Stop deadheading all your rose plants 3 to 4 weeks before the first hard frost so as not to encourage new growth at a time when new shoots may be damaged by the cold.

## Winterizing Roses

- Do not prune roses in the fall. Simply cut off any dead or diseased canes.
- Stop fertilizing 6 weeks before the [first frost](#) but continue watering during dry autumn weather to help keep plants fortified during the dry winter.
- Mound, mulch, or add compost after a few frosts but before the ground freezes. Where temperatures stay below freezing during winter, enclose the plant with a sturdy mesh cylinder, filling the enclosure with compost, mulch, dry wood chips, pine needles, or chopped leaves.
- Don't use heavy, wet, maple leaves for mulch, as they can promote mold growth. Mulch instead with oak leaves, pine needles, compost, or straw.
- Clean up the rose beds to prevent overwintering of diseases. One last spray for fungus with a dormant spray is a good idea.

## PESTS/DISEASES

Good gardening practices, such as removing dead leaves and canes, will help reduce pests. Find out which pests are most prevalent in your area by checking with your local nursery or [Cooperative Extension Service](#). Here are some of the more common problems:

- [Japanese Beetles](#)
- [Aphids](#): To keep aphids away from roses, plant [garlic](#) and [mint](#) around the roses.

- **Black Spot:** Rose plant leaves with black spots that eventually turn yellow have black spot, often caused by water splashing on leaves, especially in rainy weather. Leaves may require a protective fungicide coating, which would start in the summer before leaf spots started until first frost. Thoroughly clean up debris in the fall, and prune out all diseased canes.
- **Powdery Mildew:** If leaves, buds, and stems are covered with a white powdery coating, this is a mildew disease; mildew develops rapidly during warm, humid weather. During new growth, prevent mildew by spraying or dusting canes and leaf surfaces with fungicide. Prevent mildew by pruning out all dead or diseased canes in the spring. Destroy all diseased parts during the growing season.
- **Botrytis Blight:** If the rose's flower buds droop, stay closed, or turn brown, it has this grey fungus. Prune off all infected blossoms and remove any dead material. Fungicide application may be necessary.
- **Spider Mites**
- **Thrips**
- **Rust**
- **Stem Borers**
- **Deer:** Roses are a delectable tidbit, so try planting **lavender** near your roses. Not only will you have the makings of a nice potpourri, but the scent of lavender will discourage browsers. You can also spread human or dog hair around the garden area or check our **list of deer-resistant plants** to protect your roses.

In general, avoid rose issues by buying disease-resistant varieties and cleaning up debris, weeds, fallen leaves and any diseased plant material as soon as possible.

Also, speak to your local **Cooperative Extension** or trusted nursery about a spray program with products approved in your state.

### RECOMMENDED VARIETIES

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Traditionally, roses were notoriously challenging to grow. However, roses have changed. There are modern **easy-to-grow types of roses** such as the following:

- Rugosas, with their showy, bright-pink, five-petal blooms, are good for hedges and wherever a barrier is needed in an exposed or difficult site. They are disease-resistant and cold hardy to Zone 3. 'Jens Munk' is a good rose that blooms through most of the summer.
- Pink roses such as 'Carefree Wonder' are well-rounded shrub roses. They are 3 feet tall with a quiet character. They require only a little shaping in early spring and are hardy to Zone 5.
- Yellow roses such as 'Harrison's Yellow' (Zones 4 to 9), also called 'Pioneer Rose', blooms early, brightly, and sweetly, and will survive Zone 4 winters.
- Flower Carpet roses are excellent for ground cover. Once established, they can provide up to 2,000 flowers from spring till fall. They're extremely low maintenance, drought-tolerant, and have exceptional disease resistance.



*Flower Carpet Roses*

#### WIT & WISDOM

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- Rose hips are mildly laxative and diuretic.
- Rose petals are brewed for tea blends and sometimes used in gargles and tonics to treat congestion, sore throats, and stomach disorders.
- Rose water is a refreshing skin splash. Try a flower facial! Gentle, aromatic steam cleanses your pores. For oily skin, add a few rose petals to boiling water in a heatproof bowl. Make a bath towel tent and lean your face about 10 inches above the water. It should feel warm, not hot. After 10 minutes, rinse your face with cool water, then blot dry.
- Roses have a long and symbolic history.
- Roses are also one of the beautiful June birth flowers.