

Potomac Rose Society Information Bulletin

DEDICATED TO SERVE THOSE WHO ENJOY ROSES
District of Columbia and Potomac Area of Maryland and Virginia
Affiliated with the American Rose Society

A PRIMER FOR GROWING AWARD WINNING ROSES

There are no secret formulas or exotic methods needed to grow award-winning show roses. Some say it is just luck, but most rosarians who show roses know it takes time, hard work, patience, determination, and experience developed over time.

Become knowledgeable of those varieties that, over the years, produce blue ribbon winners. Visit gardens of exhibitors and attend rose shows to see first hand those varieties that win. Purchase good quality, 2-year-old plants from reputable nurseries. Planting 2-3 of one variety will give you a better chance of having several quality blooms as opposed to hoping, to have a winner from just one bush.

You can plant bushes in the fall but more recently I favor spring planting from the standpoint of weather. If bushes are maiden (first year) bushes, plant them in pots to provide a quicker start. This also gives you a chance to see the bloom prior to taking up a valuable spot in your garden.

Varieties that often produce blue ribbon quality blooms include (*but are not limited to*):

Bride's Dream	Keepsake
Captain Harry Stebbings	Louise Estes
Color Magic	Lynette
Crystalline	Lynn Anderson
Dublin	Marijke Koopman
Elegant Beauty	Olympiad
Elina	Paradise
Elizabeth Taylor	Peace
Garden Party	Pristine
Gold Medal	Suffolk
Great Scott	Touch of Class
John Waterer	Uncle Joe

The hole dug for the rose is usually about 18" wide by 12" deep, although the ground below is usually spaded also to allow good drainage. I always prepare my bed in the fall using the following formula for each rose planting site:

- Approximately 1/3 sphagnum peat moss
- 3 pound coffee can shredded pine bark
- 3 pound can perlite
- 1 cup green sand (potash)
- 1 cup limestone
- 1 cup rock phosphate or triple super phosphate

Add several cups gypsum which helps to break up heavy clay soils and adds sulfur, a vital ingredient to rose growth. Use several cups of dehydrated cow manure to improve the tilth of the soil. Mix all this well in a wheel barrow.

When planting bare root bushes, start by soaking them in a trash can of water mixed with some sphagnum peat moss and a light solution of soluble fertilizer or fish emulsion for at least several hours but preferably over night. Take one bush at a time, keeping the roots wrapped in a wet newspaper, to a previously prepared rose bed.

Place the roots of the rose bush over a cone of amended soil in the bottom of the hole over which you have placed a cup of bone meal. This is commonly referred to as banding. Most of my bushes are planted with the bud union at or slightly below ground level. The bud union appears as a bump or swollen place from which the new rose plant is growing. If the roots of the new bush are too long to fit into the hole, prune them to fit, as opposed to just placing them in the hole and allowing them to encircle the bush. Prune the canes back to 6"-8" to an outside bud eye and prune out all spindly growth. Backfill about half way with the prepared soil and then water thoroughly. Finish filling the hole. You can also add some fish emulsion to the water (*1 Tbsp/gal*).

The amendments to the soil contain only limited nitrogen compounds. After the first blooming cycle, apply a gallon of water solution to which is added 1 Tbsp. of soluble fertilizer (e.g. *Peters 20-20-20 or a comparable formula*) plus 1 Tbsp of fish emulsion to each plant. Good drainage is a must.

Roses do not like to remain in wet soil. A good way to administer a lot of water throughout the growing season is with a drip irrigation hose. (1"-2" per week is preferred.)

After the weather warms up (*mid-March*), it's time to prune existing rose bushes. I cut back rather severely (8"-10") and eliminate all spindly growth. Keep the strongest canes to four or five, eliminating others right down to the bud union. Clean up any remaining debris that may contain overwintering disease spores. Apply a dormant spray of horticultural oil and lime-sulfur, thoroughly wetting the canes and the surrounding mulch. Use 2-3 Tbsp of horticultural oil plus 1 Tbsp of lime-sulfur per gallon of water. You can use a solution of any good fungicide plus an insecticide in place of the oil and lime-sulfur. Be sure to follow manufacturer's directions.

Once pruning is complete, fertilize with a soluble fertilizer using 1 Tbsp of Peters 20-20-20 plus 1 Tbsp of fish emulsion to one gallon of water per bush. Apply a slow release fertilizer (e.g. *OSMOCOTE 18-6-12; 8-9 month release time*) at a rate of ½-1 cup depending on the size of the bush. Dig in lightly around the drip line of each bush. This provides continuous feeding throughout the growing season.

Alternative to a slow release fertilizer is a generalized formula of inorganics (e.g. *10-10-10 or 5-10-5*) feeding once a month up to the first of September. Other rosarians use a mix of organic fertilizers (e.g. *dried blood, cottonseed meal and bone meal*) together with the inorganics, "greensand" and rock phosphate. These can be mixed together, broadcast through the beds, and dug in lightly. Follow with a supplemental liquid fertilizer feeding in July and September.

Begin a preventive spray routine for blackspot featuring the fungicide **DACINIL** plus **TRIFORINE** at pruning time and continue at

intervals of 7-10 days. Alternate with a product such as **FORE**, containing manganese and zinc is also recommended.

If powdery mildew is present (early spring or fall), add **NOVA** or **RUBIGAN** every other spray, alternating each to keep the fungus from building up an immunity. When the weather turns hot and dry, add **AVID** or **VENDEX** to take care of the mite buildup. A hard spray of water from a hose to the underside of the leaves can also be effective in controlling mites. This is usually done three times, three days apart, to take care of mites that continue to hatch. **ORTHENE** or **MERIT** can be used for insect control if needed.

When roses begin to bud, thumb prune all buds emerging on each side of the terminal bud of the hybrid teas. On floribundas, this is reversed by removing the center bud to allow the side buds to bloom at approximately the same time to form a "spray".

One learns from experience when to cut a bloom, such as tight or half open, but a rule of thumb is to cut blooms with fewer petals at a tighter stage and those with multiple petals at ½ -2/3 open stage.

If roses start blooming prior to show time, some avid exhibitors protect their blooms from the elements by using a variety of means (umbrellas, rose cones, baggies and whatever one can imagine). Some exhibitors cut their blooms up to two weeks prior to show time and protect their blooms through a process called dry-wrapping. Other cut their blooms several days ahead and use refrigeration.

Many members of *The Potomac Rose Society* are experienced exhibitors and are glad to share with others the art of growing and preparing blooms for show. When it comes right down to it, growing roses is a learning thing, but unless one tries, you'll never experience the thrill of winning an award!

This information bulletin is based on an article by Mel Albert for *The Newsletter of THE POTOMAC ROSE SOCIETY*. If you have questions on this or any other aspect of rose growing, please contact one of our consulting rosarians for free advice. For information regarding membership, contact Joseph M. Covey, (301) 279-0028.