

Rose Care For October

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October has rolled around again, bringing with it much needed changes in our weather. At least the nights have cooled off and the days look like they may stay under 100 degrees. Mornings are already in the high 60's to low 70's, a great time to get into the yard.

During the first ten to fifteen days of the month, we should be finishing up our fall pruning. It's not too late if you get busy right now! You will have great blooms in 40-50 days, just in time for the holidays!

In most cases, especially for modern roses, fall pruning is considered light pruning, as usually no more than 1/4 to 1/3 of the bush should be removed. Start by cutting out the tops of "candelabras," dead canes, spindly stems and crossing stems. The objective is to cut back to at least a pencil size stem, particularly for hybrid teas, which is what is needed to support a good bloom. However, for bushes that have been especially damaged by the heat, prune leaving as many undamaged leaves as possible.

When finished, be sure to clean up cuttings, dead leaves and any other debris. Forest mulch seems to just melt into the soil during the summer months. Spread more to at least two to three inches deep to feed the soil, as well as spruce up the beds for the holidays. We will be adding mulch in any bare areas in our own garden, with a topping of pine needles. (Call ahead for availability at A & P Nursery, Gilbert.)

We can start to use liquid fertilizers like Magnum Grow or MiracleGro now, which provide quick release nutrients. Fertilize every 10-14 days with one gallon of mix for hybrid teas, grandifloras and floribundas. Miniatures, depending on size, require about half as much. Potted roses also require less, depending on the size of the pot. In addition, a fall application of Epsom salts will provide magnesium, which will green up the foliage and may stimulate basal breaks. Use about 1/4 cup, depending on the size of the bush, which is about a handful. Be sure to water before and after fertilization.

You can start to reduce your irrigation cycles when daytime temperatures stay below 85 degrees. By late in the month, if you flood irrigate, you can go to once a week. Drip irrigation can be reduced to three times a week. Pots can then go two to three days between watering.

With cooler nights and warm days, we need to watch for powdery mildew. Immunox is available locally, however, the best control comes from a rotation

of Compass and Banner Maxx.

For those who want cleaner blooms, especially for exhibition, you need to control thrips. Start spraying buds when pea-sized. The best products we have found are Merit, Orthene, Conserve or Cygon 2E. Merit, which contains the chemical called imidocloprid, is also found in Bayer Rose and Flower Insect Killer. (Be sure you get the product with this exact name, as Bayer has an entire line of insecticide products all in the same type of packaging.) These can be mixed in a hand sprayer or small pump sprayer, depending on how much product is needed, and sprayed directly on the blooms. Spraying just the buds instead of the entire plant helps avoid a reduction in the population of beneficial insects.

Finally, for those interested in maximizing fertilization, when buds are pea-sized, switch to fish emulsion. It can be applied every 7 to 14 days at a rate of 1 Tbsp/gallon of water, just as with Magnum Gro. Diehard exhibitors actually apply it weekly through November. The fish emulsion adds additional micro-nutrients in the quickest acting organic compound available. We find Safer Brand Fish Emulsion to contain less fish oil and so is less messy and smelly.

Two additional products popular with rosarians are Messenger and Response. Messenger effects the protein structure of the leaves and strengthens them. Response, made from red seaweed only found in New Zealand, is a key ingredient in the menu for the best foliage in the country. Add a small amount to any liquid spraying for deeper green and thicker leaves. Both products are available from the company websites, as well as RoseMania.com.

If you plan to add to your rose collection and have extra time before the onslaught of holiday activities, it is a good idea to start preparing your planting holes or beds. Amend the soil as you turn it, to a depth of at least 24." Add lots of organic matter, composted mulch or planting mix, along with Dispersal and Triple Super Phosphate, so the structure of the soil will begin improving. Our heavy soil needs this so that it can drain properly and become more biologically active. We also recommend mixing in Perlite, which will help keep the soil remain loose and aerated.

When finished with fall pruning, don't forget to go through the new catalogs or their online editions to start planning for your next new roses! Check out the lists of roses due in to Berridge's and Baker's nurseries in Phoenix, both of which bring in many thousands of roses right after the first of the year!