

THE BEGINNING ROSARIAN

Roses in August

By: Mary Bates, ARS Consulting Rosarian

If you are a beginning rosarian and your roses are looking good in August, then you are to be congratulated. If your roses do not look good then we need to evaluate where we are in our rose growing efforts.

First of all let me say, “Do not give up.” Roses are worth every effort you expend. You are fortunate as you have a valuable tool to help you succeed in growing roses – dedicated rosarians who want to help you. By joining a strong local rose society, you have made the first step towards growing good roses. Each rosarian has a little different way of doing things and a little different advice but one thing is certain – every experienced rosarian wants you to succeed and your roses to thrive.

There are four basics which roses must have to thrive: Sunlight, Food, Water and Air.

Sunlight - Are your roses planted where they will receive full sunlight for several hours a day? I have found that certain roses will take a little less than the recommended six hours of direct sunlight but never plant under the canopy of a tree. Also tree roots like to steal the rose’s food. Roses need direct sunlight for beautiful blooms. Take time to look at the sun as it passes over your bed and actually observe the amount of full sunlight your bed receives.

Food - Roses are big eaters and love rich, well drained soil. I improve my soil by using composted manures and apply Mills Magic Mix twice a year. I top dress/mulch with an organic soil conditioner (Nature’s Helper).

Many rosarians use chemicals to feed their roses, but I have found that chemicals are a bit caustic for the earthworms and since I have made such an effort to welcome them into my garden, I don’t want to offend them. For a liquid feed, I use Mills Easy Feed.

Water - Roses love water and want it regularly. Roses planted in raised beds want even more than those planted in the ground. Don’t depend upon the rain. If you are unsure if your roses need water, put your finger in the ground to determine if the soil is dry. Water deeply. If you have an irrigation system, be sure to watch the pattern of the spray. Perhaps some roses are not receiving as much as others and those will need to be hand watered during the hot month of August.

Air - Were your roses pruned properly in spring and after the first flush of blooms to allow air flow around the leaves? Often bushy blind shoots that do not produce a bud will take up too much space and hinder air flow. Are your roses too crowded with perennials? Air circulation is hindered when perennials become aggressive later in the season. If you prefer a mixed border, I have found it is best to use the more informal and hardy shrub roses in these beds, but move the perennials away from the rose to allow good air flow.

If you have sited your roses properly and provided food, water and air and your roses still aren't doing well, this leaves one other probable reason for failure to thrive – Black Spot and stress related rose diseases. These diseases can be controlled by keeping your rose beds clean, identifying the source of stress and establishing a regular spray program. If you do not wish to spray, perhaps you need to change the type of roses that you are growing. There are many beautiful roses that do not require spraying. Perhaps you selected a variety that requires more care than you can give right now. Some of my favorite easy care roses include the selections from Dr. Griffith Buck. Many of his roses as well as other easy care roses are included in the “Earthkind” Program (<http://www.houstonrose.org/earthkin.htm>). I also like the Bailey's Easy Elegance Series. There are lots of Old Garden Roses that do not like to be sprayed.

The selection is endless. Take time to research easy care roses. These are the ones that you need to start with if you do not wish to spray.

Although we have reviewed the basics to evaluate the success of our rose growing efforts to date while trying to identify areas for improvement, it is important to remember that August often brings drought-like conditions. During these trying times, it is best not to encourage growth by feeding and pruning. Hot temperatures often bring dormancy and our roses simply stop growing, but rest assured our roses will spring back when the rains return. By evaluating where we are now, we can plan better for the next season.

I have found that roses remind me of ivy. They sleep the first year, creep the second year and leap the third year. So be patient and keep up the good work and soon you will be rewarded by even better roses. The first key to successful rose growing is keeping them alive and happy.