

THE RIGHT ROSES, RIGHT NOW

By Ralph E. Mitchell

My roses always do really well during this time of year. They are blooming nicely and seem to appreciate our present slightly cooler and drier environment. While roses produce more flowers in summer, the flowers at this time of year are actually larger and have deeper color. Not to say roses are without their challenges! However, if well cared for, roses in our area can bloom all year long. With some sensible selection, maintenance, and grooming, growing a rose will provide cut flowers and beauty in any setting.

You are going to be much happier with your roses if you pick types that are suited for our Florida climate. Low-maintenance roses such as "old garden roses" and shrub roses require minimal care. At the other extreme, high-maintenance, modern roses such as hybrid teas, require more grooming, fertilizing, irrigation and pest management. Selecting roses grafted on *Rosa fortuniana* (also called 'Double White Cherokee') rootstock will grow larger, more vigorous plants that will produce more flowers and live longer than other roses. Second to *fortuniana* is Dr. Huey rootstock followed by multiflora rootstock which has the shortest life span here in Florida. There are some rose plants (the older shrub varieties) that are satisfactory, as are dwarf roses, ungrafted and on their own roots. Some good low-maintenance roses to try are 'Bourbon', 'China', and 'Bermuda'. Check local garden centers and nurseries for these roses. You may also check with regional specialty nurseries and Internet sources. Also consider checking with local rose societies and The American Rose Society at www.ars.org.

Roses need at least six hours of sun for best results. The more sun the better, but if some shade is present, it is best to plant roses so that they receive morning sunlight. This morning sun will help dry the early morning dew off

which will help reduce leaf diseases such as black spot. Roses like a well drained soil with some amendments added to improve water-holding capacity. Now, while generally we don't recommend adding soil amendments when planting woody plants, the rose is an exception which will greatly benefit from compost mixed into the upper twelve inches of soil. Start a regular maintenance fertilizer as



soon as new growth begins. Application of a complete fertilizer with micronutrients and slow-release nitrogen from mid-February to mid-November is recommended for best performance. As a final touch, good organic mulch will help retain moisture and suppress weeds. When watering, it is best to apply irrigation to the soil surface so that the leaves are kept dry. Keep in mind that roses will not tolerate irrigation water that is over 1,800 parts per million salts.

Keeping a rose plant looking its best will involve some regular grooming and pruning. Grooming is going to involve light and selective trimming such as removing dead flowers. This keeps rose hips (fruit) from developing and redirects the plants energy back into the plant for more blooms. If needed, more major pruning can be accomplished in February with a lighter follow-up pruning in August. Removal of dead, diseased, damaged or spindly growth will improve the plants form and keep the height in bounds. Flowers for the vase are best cut after the green sepals at the base of the flower fold back toward the stem and the outside petals loosen and start to unfurl. Cut the flower with a sharp knife just above a five-leaflet leaf.

Probably the biggest pest problem in our area is a fungal disease called black spot. Most low-maintenance cultivars are fairly resistant to this disease. However, removal of dead and diseased leaves will help as part of a sanitation effort. Also, mulch will help create a barrier between the rose and the soil level. Using drip irrigation will also help keep the foliage dry and thus less open to black spot infection. Fungicides are also available to protect new growth.

Roses are definitely worthy of a spot in your landscape.

For more information on growing roses, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our **Plant Clinics** are available across the county:

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** 3rd Wednesday of month 9:00am-12:00pm.

Monthly **Plant Clinics** are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Peachland Promenades Publix** - 2nd Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** - 3rd Saturday of month.
- **Lowe's Garden Center Murdock** - 4th Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by email (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

Resource:

Brown, Sydney Park (2007) Growing Roses in Florida. University of Florida/IFAS Extension Service.