

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener
Date: Mar. 11, 2007
Contact: WSU/Skagit County Extension: 428-4270

Roses are a favorite and can be a real pleasure if started properly. The choice of the site is almost as important as the soil preparation in the case of roses. Full sun is what a rose really loves and they must have no less than six hours of full sun daily. They do not like competition from tree roots or the trips from the outer edges of trees. They also need good air circulation, but appreciate a windbreak from harsh winter winds. Keep those factors in mind as you select your site.

Care in the preparation of the soil is very worthwhile. A hybrid tea rose will thrive ten years or more and a shrub rose usually continues for much longer. You are making a long-term investment and it will pay dividends if the job is done thoroughly. If the soil preparation can be done some weeks in advance of planting so much the better.

The soil can be prepared by hand, by double digging or by using a rotary tiller to a depth of twelve inches. Use a garden fork to pierce and loosen the soil below the twelve-inch level as you work, to help promote good drainage and root growth. Next, add plenty of organic matter by mixing in a three-inch layer of well rotted cow or chicken manure or well decomposed compost. David Austin, the developer of the New English Roses, suggests that it is a good idea to add some additional peat moss to this mix.

Excellent drainage is also a priority. Roses grow best in well aerated soil that retains moisture but drains well. If you have soggy, heavy clay soil, consider raised beds to improve drainage. Organic matter improves soil structure and improves drainage. Chicken grit, composed of small, sharp pieces of granite will also help to break up any clay soil.

After amending the soil, carefully smooth the bed, so that it is slightly higher in the middle and graded carefully, so that water does not puddle in the middle after heavy rains. Your rose bed is ready to plant.

The information provided in this news release is for education purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by WSU Extension is implied. WSU Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination.

This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Extension, 306 S. First Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.