

# Choosing and Planting Roses

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## Add some royalty to your garden this spring

Roses are definitely the queen of the flower garden. Beginning in June they can flower continuously until frost, with blooms unrivaled for color and fragrance.

The plants come in a variety of shapes and sizes:

- climbers that can completely cover your house or just traipse up the wall a bit
- small shrub, tall shrub, ground covers and miniatures
- flower colors that cover all the shades of the rainbow
- flower types varying from five petal simple to thirty petal pom poms
- hybrid teas with a single rose per stem or complete bouquet floribundas with dozens of flowers on each rose branch.

Growing roses in the Pacific Northwest was once considered difficult and time consuming. After all roses love warm full sun, and they prefer their water on their roots, not in the air around them—conditions that don't normally exist here in Western Washington.

But times have changed and rose breeders have listened to consumers who said that they wanted roses that grow in all climates, roses that resist disease and roses that look good. Lastly, consumers didn't want to use a lot of chemicals to achieve beautiful flowers.



Autumn Sunset tall shrub rose. *Photo by Molly Dight / WSU Skagit County Master Gardener*

If you are a discerning shopper, you can acquire roses that do well here in the Northwest. The best time to plant roses is early spring. Selection is good and you can generally buy bare root roses, which is more cost effective.

It's good to get your roses in the ground early (late February/early March) to give them a nice, long growing season and to build up their strength for winter dormancy. Though your rose will undoubtedly bloom its first year, it generally takes three years or more for a rose to mature to its full vigor, so give it time if it doesn't meet your expectations its first summer.

Choosing roses for your garden can be both delightful and overwhelming. There are a lot of roses and all are beautiful. Limiting your choices to only a few can be difficult. Luckily for you the climate in the Pacific Northwest is going to limit your selection.

Consider only those that are labeled “disease resistant.” Sometimes the label specifies which diseases the rose is resistant to, sometimes it doesn’t. If it doesn’t say it’s resistant—don’t buy it!

Stay away from roses that are described as “heat loving” or “wonderfully tolerant of hot weather.” Odds are they aren’t going to like our humid, cool summers.

Rose growers are now selling “no spray roses,” which sounds like just another way of saying disease resistant. It’s okay to give them a go.

Buy roses that are grown on their own roots instead of grafted. This isn’t a deal breaker, but if the winter turns bad and freezes down your rose, you’ll likely get the original rose and not the grafted rose (the one you wanted).

Researching your rose selections online is a good idea. Companies that sell roses can put only so much information on those little tags, so check several different sites for more information.



**Above left:** Hybrid tea rose with dew. *Photo by Virgene Link* **Above right:** Sally Holmes shrub rose. *Photo by Jane Billinghamurst / Both WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners*

You can also purchase roses online. The prices can appear to be cheaper than buying from a local nursery, but be sure to calculate shipping costs as they can add significantly to the price.

Some online nurseries sell roses in “bands” that are actually immature roses. You’ll receive a cute little 6 to 8-inch rose plant that you’ll need to pot up right away and protect until it’s big enough to plant out in the elements. Bands are generally on their own roots.

How often a rose blooms is something else you should pay attention to. Repeat bloomers will continue to bloom most of the summer; older rose species and rugosas will bloom only once a year. Generally the rose description will tell you how often to expect blooms.

Once you've chosen a couple of roses and are ready to plant, choose your spot carefully.

Roses, even those for the Pacific Northwest, still like as much sun as possible, so don't plant on the north side of anything.

Keep roses out of deep shade, and stay away from soggy soils. They do not like to have their roots in standing water. Like many plants they like a nice rich loamy soil with a middle of the road pH (about 7).

When planting, mix in some tasty organics like mushroom compost or well-rotted manure. If you're going to feed your rose with a commercial food, wait until April to do so. Give the plant time to stretch out and get acquainted with its new home before encouraging blooms.

Don't be afraid to give roses a try. You won't regret adding a little royalty to your garden.



Grade-one roses were set out a couple of weeks ago in the new demonstration beds at the WSU Discovery Garden west of Mount Vernon. With three or more strong canes, the roses will be loaded with fragrant blossoms by summer. *Photo by Christine Farrow/WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners*