

## Spring Rose Pruning

As the month of February progresses gardeners begin to get anxious, in particular those of us who want to get out and prune roses. Pruning is a simple process if we keep one fact in mind: no matter how you prune, unless you cut the rose off below the ground line, it will survive and bloom. A total lack of pruning is worse for the plant than over-pruning, so prune with confidence and the results will be good.

The purpose of spring pruning is to remove all weak or diseased growth, leaving only strong, healthy canes that can support the expected new growth. A large portion of the upper plant should be removed. This concept is true for hybrid teas, floribundas, shrubs and miniature roses. We'll deal later with climbers, old garden roses (OGRs), English and nonremontant (once blooming) varieties.

Begin pruning by looking closely at the rose bush. Every bush in the garden will have grown differently during the past season, so carefully consider what you have to start with. Direct your examination toward the lower part of the bush – specifically to the bud union from which the canes originate. Identify the youngest and strongest canes by their color, texture and size. Young canes (one or two years old) are usually green in color and have a relatively smooth surface. As a cane ages it becomes darker or gray-brown in color as it develops bark. With further aging the surface becomes rough due to cracking and peeling of the outer bark. Looking at last year's growth can identify a non-productive older cane. If it is small and twiggy the cane should be removed, as it will not produce strong and vigorous new growth. Remove such canes entirely by cutting them off at the bud union (their origin), using loppers or a pruning saw. When removing a cane try to get the entire cane leaving little, or ideally, no stump. Stumps left protruding from the bud union provide ideal conditions for the colonization of disease organisms and are also unsightly. An older cane that has healthy secondary canes (larger than a pencil) usually will be productive and can be saved.



Next remove any of the younger canes that cross the middle of the bush. Remove them either back to the bud union or to the major cane from which they originate. Remove any canes that rub against another cane or are crowded close to one another, generally leaving the larger one of the crowded pair. If there is any twiggy growth remaining on the bush, remove it back to its point of origin.

When pruning is complete, the ideal rose bush will have only sturdy, healthy canes radiating from the bud union. The ideal is rarely achieved, as most bushes do not have enough canes growing in just the right directions. If the bush has only 2, 3 or 4 canes it would be best to allow

them all to remain, unless one of them is truly a non-productive old cane. If the rose has 5 to 7 or more canes you can make decisions about which ones to remove to create a pleasing balance. At this time remove any leaves remaining on the canes, as over-wintered leaves often harbor diseases. Finally, spray the newly pruned bushes with a fungicide. This should be repeated at ten day to two-week intervals during wet or damp weather to maintain disease free bushes. Do not apply dormant spray at this time. It contains sulfur at concentrations that will damage young buds that have begun to break dormancy. For most rose bushes an outcome similar to the sketch is desirable.



There are three categories for pruning height:

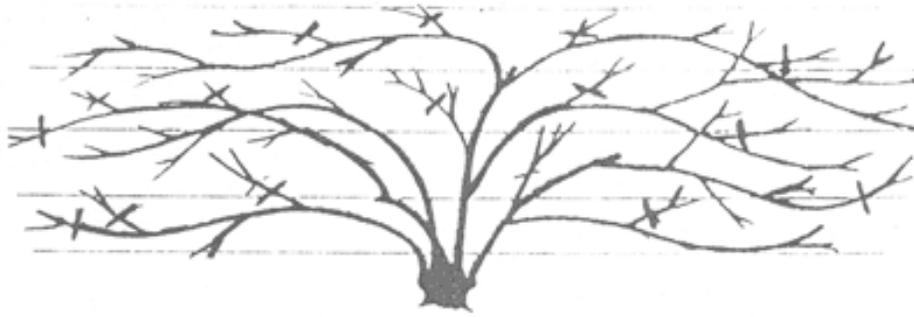
When doing a hard pruning the canes are cut back so that there are only 3 or 4 buds on each of the 3 to 5 canes. The reasoning is that the new canes can be no larger than the ones from which they originate. As the new canes grow from large, old canes they will probably also be large, resulting in fewer but larger blooms. A hard pruning leaves canes 5 to 12 inches long. Primarily those who exhibit their roses use this method.

With a moderate pruning the canes are cut back to 12 to 18 inches. Weaker than average canes should be reduced by more than this amount. This is the recommended pruning style for most hybrid teas and floribundas in home gardens. This method will result in a healthy bush that will produce abundant blooms during the current growing season. The flowers will be slightly smaller than if the rose was given a hard pruning.

Light pruning results in about two-thirds of the canes' length remaining. In our climate light pruning is not recommended because it often leads to tall, spindly bushes. The bushes will bear blooms earlier in the year, but the blooms will usually be of poor quality and without stems suitable for cutting or of insufficient girth to hold up the flowers. The only exception is roses in the "Peace" family. These plants often perform well with a light pruning, but all small, twiggy growth should be removed.

Mild winters can bring early, leafy growth to roses. Gardeners are often reluctant to prune this new growth, but it is necessary to do so to prevent breakage of small canes by spring rains, wind and late frosts. Do not be afraid you will over prune! It is almost always true that vigorous pruning will produce better results with roses than pruning them too little.

Climbers require a different pruning method. They are usually trained into a horizontal position. If so, the only pruning that should be done in the spring is to prune the laterals, which are the short upright shoots coming from the main canes. The laterals should be reduced in length so that only 2 or 3 bud eyes remain, which is usually about 2 to 4 inches. An alternative method is to completely remove the laterals. This will force the climber to produce new laterals from dormant eyes in the main cane. Any old canes that were unproductive the previous year should be removed to ground level. Any new canes should be trained by tying them into a horizontal position. Additional pruning may be done to shape the bush to fit the style that is desired and to keep it in bounds. The illustration shows spring pruning to be done.



Miniature roses are pruned in much the same way as hybrid teas only on a smaller scale. Prune the healthy canes 4 to 8 inches long and remove all twiggy growth. Miniatures are very vigorous and will respond well to severe pruning by producing new basal breaks; that is new stems originating from below ground.

OGRs and other one-time bloomers should be lightly pruned to shape and control size and to remove unproductive old wood. More pruning can be done; however, these rose types produce their blooms on old wood and removing additional wood now reduces this year's blooms. Reserve any major pruning on these roses until the blooming cycle is complete.

English (David Austin) roses may be pruned like hybrid teas, using light to moderate pruning methods. Most English roses bloom on new wood, so pruning is done to produce a healthy base. A few English roses grow like climbers and should be pruned using that method.

The object of spring rose pruning is to produce healthy plants that have abundant blooms. Remove the portions of the bushes that are too small or weak to support new growth and leave as much strong wood as you desire. When in doubt, prune it out.