



FROM A GARDENING PERSPECTIVE...

CARING FOR ROSES IN WINTER

By

Holly Hoover, Palo Pinto County Master Gardener

Roses can be the most beautiful plants in a garden. Caring for them in the Fall and Winter will help them along the way.

There are a few things that should never be done to roses in the Fall. Pruning, other than dead-heading, should not be done in the Fall. That is because pruning tells a rose to start new growth near the cut site. It takes new growth at least 6 weeks to become strong enough to withstand a frost or freezing temperatures. Fall pruning might result in some nice new growth and new blooms, but, come first frost or freeze, the new foliage and blooms will be ruined. That new growth portion of the plant will not be alive in the Spring. In the end, late pruning will cause more freeze damage to the rose than would have happened if the gardener had just waited. It is much better to prune a rose in late Winter. Mid-February to early March is the best time to prune roses in Palo Pinto County. By the time the new growth starts, danger of frost is mostly past. Any damage near the pruning site will be minimal during this period. A second, lighter pruning can safely be done in early June if required to shape the plant.

Fertilizing roses should never be done in the Fall. Fertilizer stimulates the rose to grow, increasing the danger of freeze damage. The best time to fertilize a rose is Mid-February to early March. Valentines Day is a good way to remember when to fertilize. The next time to fertilize comes in early June or around Flag Day. A good quality, name brand rose fertilizer is balanced especially for roses. The proper ratio for roses is approximately 6-12-6. Label instructions should be followed. "Less is More" in the world of fertilizer. Too much will burn the roots and foliage and can kill a rose. Mature roses can tolerate granular formulas, but the best way to feed first year roses is with a diluted liquid formula. There are several name brands of this type of product on the market.

There are a couple of things that **MUST** be done to roses in the Fall. Mulch is essential for healthy, happy roses. The best kind of mulch is a coarsely ground hardwood mulch. This type decomposes and adds nutrients to the soil around the base of the plant much quicker than other types. If hardwood mulch is not available, cypress and cedar are good choices. A three to four inch layer is the correct amount. In Winter, mulch is especially important to protect roots from freezing temperatures. During the rest of the year, mulch helps retain moisture in the soil and moderate soil temperature. The most important thing to remember is not to mound mulch against the base of the plant. At least an inch or two of air space should be left around the base. Any direct contact could cause rotting of the plant stem.

Roses should be watered in the Winter if it doesn't rain. During a winter drought, a monthly deep watering should suffice. A newly planted rose should be watered weekly. One deep watering is much more beneficial than several light waterings. Foliage should not be sprayed. This can cause or worsen diseases and fungus problems.

Overall, roses provide year round beauty in the garden with very little effort. Questions about growing roses in Palo Pinto County can be directed to the extension office at 940-659-1228.