



FROM A GARDENING PERSPECTIVE...

Earth-Kind Roses

By

Holly Hoover, Palo Pinto County Master Gardener

The first question most people ask when they hear the term “Earth-Kind Rose” is...“What does that mean?” Earth-Kind is a special designation given to specific roses by Texas Agri-Life Extension Service.

The roses that receive this special designation have been through years of extensive field trials and testing. The trials determine which roses are the most disease, insect, heat, and drought tolerant roses for our area. “Earth Kind” designation suggests that these roses provide superior landscape performance. These roses do not need to be sprayed with chemicals, fertilized, pruned or deadheaded (which means simply to remove spent blooms). They only need supplemental watering during their first year of growth (as does any new plant), or in years of drought like we have been experiencing recently.

Here are a few guidelines for giving your new Earth-Kind roses a great start:

1. Choose a proper planting site.
2. Prepare the soil.
3. Maintain the planting bed.

*A proper planting site is one that receives at least 6 to 8 hours of full sun per day, has good air-flow all around the plant, and will allow for at least 1 foot of open space around the plant after it has reached its mature size. Not considering how large a plant will be when it reaches its full size is one of the top mistakes gardeners make. I include myself in this category.

*Bed preparation is key for new rose or flowerbeds. The Earth-Kind recommendations for proper bed preparation include adding 3 to 6 inches of fully decomposed, organic compost into the existing soil. This adds beneficial nutrients for your plants. If you have clay soil, it is also recommended to add 3 inches of expanded shale into the soil. Expanded shale may look like gravel, but it is actually shale that has been heated until it expands. This expansion leaves tiny holes in the surface of the shale which hold moisture and air that are released into the soil as needed. The final step and finishing touch in bed preparation is to add a 3 to 4 inch layer of organic mulch to your beds. Hardwood mulch is considered the best mulch for this application, because it breaks down slowly, releasing essential nutrients into the soil.

*Maintenance is easy:

1) Simply maintain the 3 to 4 inch layer of hardwood mulch year round. This means that as the mulch breaks down, add more to keep a constant level. The mulch serves several purposes. It adds nutrients that your plants need, helps maintain soil moisture, and helps to regulate soil temperatures. Mulch protects your plants' roots from excessive heat in the summer as well as freezing temperatures in the winter.

2) Water as needed when the soil in your plants' root zone is dry to a depth of 1 inch below the top of the soil level.

Roses do not appreciate being watered by sprinklers. The best way to water is by hand at the soil line or by installing drip irrigation. One nice deep watering is better than more frequent shallow waterings. Remember it is just as easy to kill a plant by over-watering as it is by under-watering.

Currently there are 21 varieties of Earth-Kind Roses available. Many of these are available at local nurseries or on-line at accredited Texas nurseries. Belinda's Dream is this writer's favorite because of its very large, full, fragrant and plentiful pink blooms.

For a list of Earth-Kind Roses and more information on this topic, go to: www.aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind. Or call the Texas Agri-Life Extension Service at 940-659-1228.