

Ag News

Submitted: 1-26-17

Solving the Mystery of Pruning Roses

February is the month when most modern roses need to be pruned. Even if your roses have already begun growth, the time has come to prune. Annual heavy pruning is essential to insure the prolific bloom and long-life of a rose bush.

Explaining the concept of rose pruning without a live bush to demonstrate on is difficult, so let your mind loose to help visualize the following steps in rose pruning:

- Pruning of roses is actually done year round. Every time you cut off old blooms and remove twiggy growth, you are actually promoting new growth. There are two times a year when you prune more seriously, spring and fall.
- You will need the following items: a good pair of hand pruners (preferably the scissor type, not anvil type), a sharp keyhole saw and large loppers, a heavy pair of leather gloves, a pruning compound and a dull knife.
- The first step in spring pruning of Hybrid Teas, Grandifloras, Floribundas and Climbing roses is to remove any canes that are dead or just old and non-productive. These canes are usually gray in color and scaly.
- This pruning will encourage future “basal” breaks which are the life blood of any rose bush. Basal breaks refer to new shoots, soon to be producing canes, which arise from the graft union. These should not be confused with “suckers” which arise from the rootstock below the graft union. Remove all suckers.
- Beginning to fine tune the pruning, remove all twiggy growth on the remaining canes (note: the fine tune pruning on climbing roses should be done after they bloom in the spring). Try to clean out the middle of the bush as much as possible. This allows for good air circulation to prevent insects and disease.

- Now you are ready to prune on the good healthy canes. If your roses have already flushed growth, it is important to prune each cane back to a dormant bud. A bud that has already begun growth and is then pruned will simply continue to grow vigorously and bloom very little. A dormant, non-growing bud will initiate growth after pruning and will produce an abundance of blooms.
- One comment used to describe pruning is to “prune to an outside bud.” This means when picking the point on a given cane to cut back to, make sure there is a good bud on the cane facing toward the outside of the plant. This will insure the growth of the new bud is to the outside, therefore keeping the center of the rose bush clear and open for air circulation.
- Another guideline in pruning back an individual cane is to cut the cane at the point when the diameter of the cane is the size of a pencil or slightly larger. This is normally at a height of 18 to 14 inches. If there is the need to prune back to a dormant bud, the size of the cane may be larger and the cane length may be shorter.

The final product of your pruning should be a rose bush about 18 to 24 inches tall with 4 to 8 canes. Add some mulch, water and tender-loving-care, and that pitiful looking rose bush will soon give you a shower of flowers.