

GROWING ROSES IN THE GAINESVILLE AREA

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Because of varying soils and other garden conditions as well as differences in the individual grower's interests and expectations, there is no exact formula for growing and maintaining healthy roses. However, there are basic needs that must be met, particularly in the realm of nutrition and disease control. The Gainesville Rose Society (GRS) presents the following as a guide to the beginning rosarian.

7 Steps to Successful Roses

1. **SUNSHINE:** Roses need a minimum of six hours of direct sunshine to thrive. Morning sunshine is preferable to afternoon sunshine here in Florida.
2. **SPACE:** Except for Miniatures and the smaller Polyanthas, allow at least 6 feet between plants. Plant bushes at least 10 feet from shrubbery and trees to allow good air circulation and for protection from competing and invading root systems. Avoid 'boggy' areas. Minor drainage problems can be corrected by raising the bed 6-10 inches. Plant at least 2 feet away from any wall. Concrete foundations draw water away from the surrounding soil. Even climbers should be planted at least 2 feet from a foundation wall or fence.
3. **ROOTSTOCK:** Most modern rose varieties perform best in the ground in our area if grafted on Fortuniana rootstock. Many Old Garden Roses are an exception to this rule and do well in the ground on their own roots. Consult other GRS handouts for a listing of proven varieties (both modern & old) for our area and for sources of roses grafted on Fortuniana and own root. Unfortunately, most container-grown and packaged roses sold in our area are on a less desirable rootstock such as Dr. Huey or Multiflora. These roses will survive here but often for a much shorter period of time, and they tend to be less vigorous. When purchasing roses at a nursery, inspect the leaves carefully and avoid plants with white or yellow streaking or mottling on the leaves. They may have a viral infection. Bare root roses, either packaged from a local retailer or from a mail-order firm, may be planted anytime during the cooler months of winter and early spring. The roots should be soaked in plain water overnight before planting.
4. **SOIL PREPARATION:** Roses have high nutritional needs which our sandy soil alone cannot provide. You should enhance the soil by preparing an area equivalent to the potential root mass of the future mature rose bush with organic matter and various nutritional amendments. One such modification is outlined below in the process of planting a rose bush.
 - a. Dig a hole about 30 inches in diameter and 15 inches deep. Save the top 8 inches of soil and discard the rest.
 - b. Mix the saved soil with 2 five-gallon buckets of compost, or peat moss, or well-rotted manure, or commercially dehydrated manure or any combination of these.
 - c. To the above mixture, add one cup of super phosphate, two cups of dolomite lime, and two cups of milorganite and mix thoroughly.
 - d. Spread two cups bone meal evenly in the bottom of the hole. Then add about half the mixture from (c) followed by enough water to settle the mixture.

e. Remove the rose bush from the container and place it in the center of the hole, adjusting the height if necessary so the graft union is 3-4 inches above ground level. If the plant is not grafted, keep the soil level from the container about the same as ground level. Add remaining soil mix and pack down firmly to remove air pockets. Water to saturation.

f. If the bush is grafted, staking well at the time of planting will prevent a graft union from possibly breaking off during high wind.

g. Mulch well with 4-6 inches of coarse organic material leaving the graft union uncovered

5. **SPRAY:** Black spot is a very serious disease of Florida roses. It damages the foliage necessary to supply food to the plant. Keep it in check with a preventive, weekly fungicide spray program from the time of first new growth in spring through the end of the blooming in the fall. Keep a close eye out for aphids, thrips and spider mites. They may cause serious cosmetic damage to foliage and/or blooms, but damage can be minimized by spraying after early detection with an appropriate insecticide or miticide. Preventive spraying for insects and spider mites is not generally recommended because of the high risk to beneficial insects. *Manzate*, *funginex*, and *immunox* are good fungicides that are available from local retailers. Alternate *funginex* and *immunox* from week to week and add in *manzate* at least every other time. Adding one tablespoon of vinegar and a few drops of dish detergent per gallon of water will improve the performance of fungicides. *Orthene* and *cygone* are good broad spectrum insecticides for aphids and thrips. There are good broad spectrum insecticides for aphids and thrips. There are chemicals available specifically for use on mites, but often a thorough, strong spray of plain water to the undersides of leaves will do the job. A primary rule for spraying is to always follow the label on any chemical being used. Spray early in the morning, as the dew is starting to dry. This is the best time for the plants to absorb the spray and fewer beneficial bugs are out.

If you are adverse to spraying, try and choose roses that are disease resistant (Earth Kind Roses for example) and will survive without chemical fungicides. Clean up your roses frequently by picking diseased leaves and removing them from the garden.

Organicide is a nature-safe organic insect control and fungicide effective on a wide variety of insects, mites, armored and soft scales, and certain fungal diseases. *Organicide & Safer* products can be found at local retailers.

Baking Soda Mixture: 1 tbs. Baking soda, 1 tsp. Liquid soap in a gallon of water. This solution works in helping to prevent black spot and powdery mildew. Starting early in the growing season, spray on a regular basis in order to prevent fungus.

6. **FERTILIZE & WATER:** Roses require an adequate supply of water and nutrients if they are to perform as you desire. Begin fertilizing new plants after new growth is well started. Fertilize all in-ground rose bushes once a month with a granular fertilizer from early March through October. Any well balanced (i.e., 10-10-10; 12-6-10) granular fertilizer with secondary and minor elements is satisfactory. Usually ½ to 1 ½ cups per bush, depending on size, is sufficient. Broadcast evenly to well beyond the drip line of the bush. Be sure the soil is moist before fertilizing, and always water deeply after fertilizing to avoid burning the roots.

Research has found that *kelp extract* works wonders for plant health. It is believed that kelp extract contains a compound that stimulates a plant's immune system. Kelp is rich in the trace elements that are missing from some commercial fertilizers.

Fish emulsion is a nicely balanced fertilizer. It can be used as a foliar spray for quick feeding or a root drench at regular intervals. Fish emulsion also has a little sulfur in it, which may help with controlling fungal disease.

Milorganite is a proven organic fertilizer. It is non-burning, it will not harm tender leaves or roots. It can be applied in the hottest temperature or driest conditions.

Milorganite contains virtually no chemical salts so it never burns. It is a slow release fertilizer so it will not leach from the root-zone with frequent watering.

Epsom Salts (magnesium sulfate) applied around the rose in late December helps promote root growth, basal breaks, strong canes, and lush foliage. Apply about 1/3 cup per rose.

7. **GROOM & PRUNE:** Groom your modern rose bushes on a regular basis by cutting off spent blooms (“dead-heading”) down to a 5-leaflet leaf pointing away from the plant’s center. Cutting out spindly or blind growth, sideways growth, and dead branches, and removing discolored or diseased foliage. Go easy on new bushes, especially during their first year when maximum growth is the main objective.

Locally, pruning is done in January or February. On most modern varieties, 1/3 to 1/2 of the growth is removed. Make cuts at a 45 degree angle just above a leaf bud pointing out. Remove all weak branches, any lateral branches that are growing toward the center of the bush, any dead branches, and as bushes age, any old, yellowing, unproductive canes.

On Old Garden Roses, trim off only enough outer wood to shape the bushes and maintain the desired size. Also remove any dead wood and old, unproductive canes.

After pruning, many rosarians apply liberal amounts of organic and other slow-release nutrients around each rose bush. Some examples are cottonseed meal, composted manure, bone meal, milorganite, alfalfa pellets, sul-po-mag, and Epsom salts. This ‘organic treatment’ is then covered with a fresh layer of mulch. Mulch keeps the soil cooler in the summer, warmer in the winter and discourages weeds. It helps in retaining moisture and then it decomposes to enrich the soil which then in turn helps to retain moisture, attracts worms which aerate the soil and adds nutrients to the soil. Soil health is relevant to almost all plant problems. Moisture, drainage, and soil fertility are integral to plant health, but the most important factor is the soil. Healthy plants are less likely to attract bug infestations or will ward them off when they occur.