

ROSE PRUNING BASICS FOR NORTHERN NEVADA

by Ann Marie Harris

Three questions are invariably asked when the subject of pruning is discussed: why, when, and how.

Why are roses pruned? To the beginning rose gardener, pruning may seem to be a lot of work that creates a mutilated plant. In fact, some roses will grow quite well without any pruning at all. For best results, however, roses should be pruned for the following reasons:

1. Roses are pruned to remove diseased and damaged parts. If these parts are left on the bush, the health of the bush could deteriorate and the quality of the blooms decline.

2. Roses are pruned to keep the plant within the confines of the space allotted to it in the garden and the shape desired by the gardener.

3. Roses are pruned to improve the quality of the blooms. For those members who plan to exhibit prize-winning blooms, this is a major reason to control the growth of the plant.

4. Roses are pruned to encourage the growth of new basal shoots from the bud union of grafted roses. Please note that not all roses are grafted.

When to prune? The "proper" date to prune in northern Nevada depends entirely on the location of the rose, the fickleness of our weather, and the purpose of the pruning. The "proper" time to prune even in the Truckee Meadows area can vary depending on location by three weeks and also depends on the type rose being pruned. In our

region, the best time to prune is from March 20 to April 20.

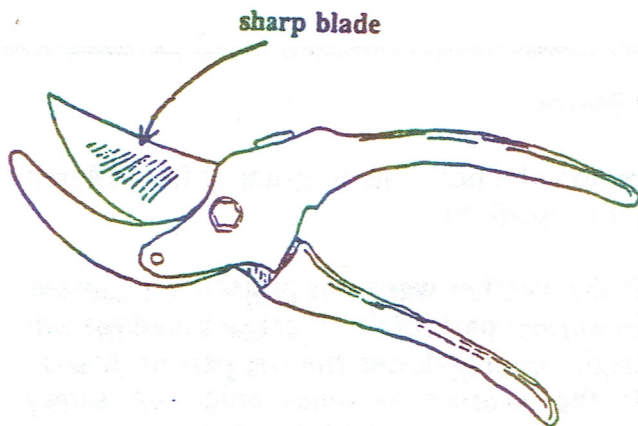
If the weather warms as projected, rosarians in warmer parts of the Truckee Meadows will begin pruning during the last part of March. If the weather becomes cold and snowy again, pruning should be delayed one to three weeks. Rose growers at higher and colder elevations should probably delay pruning until after April 15. If you plan to exhibit at rose shows, expect to prune again five to six weeks before the show date. The local exhibitors who plan to exhibit at the Reno Rose Show in June will begin pruning during the last week of April to produce the best blooms for the show.

How to prune? The answer has four parts: the tools needed, knowing the class of the rose being pruned, the mechanics of the pruning itself, and what is done after removal of undesired plant parts.

What tools and other material should be used?

1. A sharp pair of pruning or cutting shears is generally recommended to the home gardener. These shears should be the type with a thin, convex-curved top blade which cuts against the side of a concave-curved anvil blade in an action which is similar to that of scissors. We do not recommend using shears which have a straight blade that cuts through to a flat anvil. The flat anvil type tends to crush the stem around the cut and may cause future dieback. Both types of pruning shears will be

shown at the pruning demonstration. Be sure all of your pruning tools are sharp so that you make clean cuts and do not damage the bark and leave frayed edges.



Shears with concave-curved blades

2. A pair of lopping shears with handles of at least 20 inches is recommended for cutting through heavier canes. The type blades should be the same as the pruning shears described above.

3. In addition to and sometimes instead of the lopping shears, many gardeners elect to use pruning saws. Substitutes for the pruning shears include small coping saws, keyhole saws, or hacksaw blades with one end wrapped as a handle.

4. A small stiff bristle brush is the best tool for cleaning loose bark away from the bud union. Do not use brushes with metal bristles because of possible damage to the plant.

5. To reduce the spread of disease obtain a supply of disinfectant such as alcohol, bleach or Lysol to dip pruning tools into before moving to the next plant.

6. To prevent the entry of insects and disease organisms into the newly made cuts, we recommend use of a sealant on all cuts. Sealants should be nontoxic materials such as Elmer's Glue or non-petroleum sealing compounds such as those shown at the pruning demonstration.

7. Because roses have thorns, the use of

leather gloves to protect your hands and eye glasses for eye protection is recommended. Be aware that the thorns that may scratch you have been sprayed with chemicals intended to kill living things, and clean your punctures and scratches accordingly.

How to prune? There is no substitute for coming to the rose pruning demonstration, observing, and, if time allows, practicing with the assistance of more experienced rosarians. While you are pruning, examine the condition of the plant for indications of disease. Basic guidelines for pruning most hybrid tea, grandiflora, and floribunda roses are outlined below.

Many climbers, ramblers, and "old-fashioned" roses bloom only once a year and produce blooms only from old wood (canes and laterals produced in the previous growing season). If you prune them at the same time and in the same way you prune hybrid teas and floribundas, you will probably have so few blooms you may be tempted to get rid of them. Special comments regarding pruning these roses is included below following the section on hybrid teas, floribundas, and grandifloras.

1. Make your cuts $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch above a bud-eye pointed toward the desired direction of growth. These cuts should be at a 45° angle to the cane with the lowest point of the cut opposite the bud-eye.



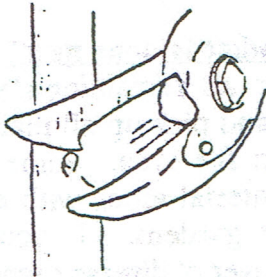
Perfect Pruning Cut
 45° slope away from bud eye
high side $\frac{1}{4}$ inch above bud eye



Improper Cut
cut is too flat
and too far
above the bud eye



Improper Cut
cut is too steep
and ends below
the bud eye



The desired direction of growth is usually pointed away from the center of the plant. When making your cuts, keep the convex-curved (sharp) blade of your pruning shears next to the part staying on the plant.

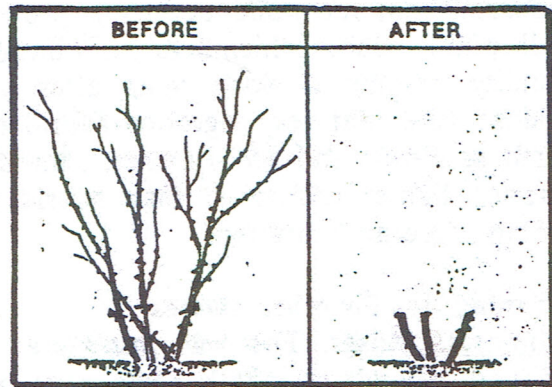
2. Cut off all dead, diseased or damaged wood. Dead canes are brown and shriveled throughout. Dying or damaged wood has brown discoloration through part of the cane. Keep removing more of the cane until the wood is white or greenish white clear through.

3. Remove suckers from grafted plants by pulling or twisting off. If you cut suckers off more will recur.

4. Remove twiggy, crowded or crossing canes and open the center of the plant to allow more sunshine and air circulation.

5. Prune the remaining canes and laterals hard, moderately or lightly according to the type of rose and the desired growth:

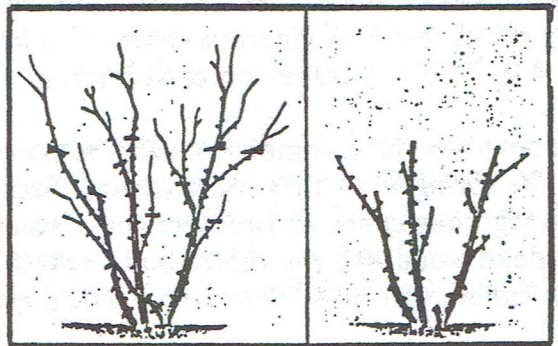
Hard Pruning: Canes are cut back to three of four buds per cane. This leaves short, sturdy canes about 5 inches high:



Moderate Pruning: Canes are cut back to about half their length. Weaker than average canes should be reduced by more than this amount. A few laterals are left on the plant:



Light Pruning: Canes are cut back to about two-thirds of their length. More laterals are left on the plant:



Hard pruning is used on newly-planted bush roses and by serious exhibitors on well established hybrid teas solely to produce exhibition blooms. Moderate pruning is recommended for nearly all established hybrid teas. Moderately-pruned grandifloras should be left slightly taller than hybrid teas. Floribundas are also generally pruned using a var-

iation of moderate pruning. Light pruning is generally not recommended as it produces tall spindly bushes which bear early but poor quality blooms if done year after year. Please note that very vigorous hybrid teas, such as *Peace* and *Mr. Lincoln*, should be pruned lighter and taller than hybrid teas being moderately pruned.

Pruning tips for other classes:

Miniature Roses. The way miniatures are pruned depends on whether you want landscape color or plan to exhibit. For landscape color, you can prune using garden or hedge clippers to trim the entire plant anywhere between 8 and 15 inches in height. If you intend to exhibit your miniatures, then prune them the same way you prune hybrid teas. In both cases, remove dead and twiggy growth first and open the center of the plant to ensure good air circulation to reduce disease.

Climbers. These are pruned at different times depending on whether they are once-blooming or repeat-blooming. Climbers which only bloom once a year should be pruned after spring bloom. Remove the oldest flowering canes, any dead or diseased wood, and the weakest of the new canes leaving 4-5 of the most vigorous canes. Cut back to 4 or 5 sets of leaves on each lateral.

Repeat-blooming climbers should be pruned in the spring when they are dormant. Retain 3-6 vigorous canes and remove any diseased or dead wood and the oldest and weakest of the canes. Cut back laterals to 2-4 bud eyes.

Albas, Centifolias, Hybrid Musks, Polyanthas, Rugosas, and Once-blooming Shrubs. Prune after spring bloom. Remove dead wood and spindly canes, remove part of old wood to encourage growth of new canes, and shorten longer canes by 1/3 to 1/2.

Bourbons, Chinas, Once-blooming Damasks,

Noisettes, and Repeat-blooming Shrubs. Prune when plants are dormant. Remove dead wood, crossed canes, and twiggy growth. Shape bush and cut remainder back by 1/4 at most.

Repeat-blooming Damasks, Hybrid Perpetuals, and Portlands. Prune when dormant using the same techniques as hybrid teas.

Ramblers, and Species Roses. Prune after spring bloom to keep plant close to desired size. Remove all dead wood and very old wood to encourage growth of new canes.

After pruning, what is done next?

1. Remove all remaining dead leaves from the plant and pick up all plant cuttings and debris from the area. Some rosarians compost this material along with everything else from their gardens. If you want to minimize carry-over of disease organisms and insect eggs, dispose of this material by putting it in the trash or burning and do not use any of your rose leaves or cuttings for compost.

2. Cover the ends of all cut canes with a sealant such as Elmer's Glue to prevent entry of insects and diseases into the cuts. Cane-borers (which are actually twig-nesting wasps) will use non-sealed pithy surfaces of the cut canes to drill holes 4-6 inches deep to start their nests. An unsealed cut can also allow entry of disease micro-organisms which cause other problems.

3. Spray the plant with a dormant spray as outlined in "Dormant Season Control of Rose Pests and Diseases" in the February 1995 *Sierra Roses*. Do not spray with a sulfur, copper or oil based spray if the bud-eyes have developed into foliage; you will burn and kill back all of the tender new growth. If leaves have developed, contact your Consulting Rosarians for recommendations of other spray materials.

4. Add fertilizer according to your growing program.