

ROSES

According to the Rio Grande Valley Rose Society (2700 Atlanta Dr. Pharr, TX. 78577), the Rio Grande Valley is one of the best areas in the United States to grow roses. The Valley and few other areas in the U.S. can, with proper care, produce long stem roses every month of the year and give you fresh cut roses for your Christmas table. The following: buying, planting, pruning, fertilizing and pest control tips will have you enjoying roses in your Valley garden and home.

Buying Rose Bushes

Purchase only potted rosebushes from our local Valley nurseries. Why? Because our area nurseries buy bare-root plants that have been grafted onto Dr. Huey or Mexican rootstock or California rootstock. Then they plant them in pots, hold them until they produce healthy, leafy bushes, then select for sale only those rosebushes that are strong and ready to be planted in your rose bed. It is a must that you have rosebushes that are grafted onto Dr. Huey or Mexican or California rootstock. Dr. Huey, a California plant scientist selected Mexican rose rootstock thus, the reason for the three names. This Mexican rootstock is adapted to thrive in our Valley high pH alkaline soils and heat, and is tolerant to microscopic worms (nematodes) which destroy the feeder-roots of other rose rootstocks. Do not buy rosebushes grafted on Tyler (Tyler, Texas) rootstock, as this rootstock is adapted to more acidic soils of north and east Texas. Bare-root rosebushes from discount stores are normally not grafted on Dr. Huey rootstock. Although inexpensive, they rarely live more than one year even if planted correctly. Therefore, in the long run, rosebushes from discount stores are more expensive than the excellent potted rosebush on Dr. Huey rootstock from our local nurseries. However, there are several "Antique" or heirloom roses, which grow on their own roots. A few of these old or "Antique" varieties have been cultivated in Valley gardens for many years and may be available at your local nursery or garden center, or contact the Valley Rose Society for availability.

Planting Time & Watering

Select a spot that will receive at least 6 hours of direct sunlight. It is best that roses get early morning sunlight in order to dry leaves, which reduces disease. Try to avoid exposure to late afternoon direct sunlight as the heat and direct sun at this time of day is very stressful to the plant and blooms. The ideal time to plant potted rose bushes, regardless of variety, is February through April, after the chance of any freeze. Or in January if the winter is exceptionally mild. This period of time is when our local nurseries have potted rosebushes and the largest selection of varieties available. It is also when the soils are cool, allowing for the necessary time for development of a strong healthy root system to support the plant and flowers during the hotter months. For other planting times contact your local nursery professional.

Planting potted rosebushes. Dig a hole 6 to 8 inches wider than the diameter of the pot and just deep enough so that the rose graft union (the bulge of bark, near the soil line, that attaches leafy stems to the rootstock) will be ABOVE the ground level when planted. Remove the root system from the pot, being careful

not to disturb the roots, hold the root system together and place into the hole. Gently pack a mixture of one part soil with an equal part potting mix or moist peatmoss around the entire root system. When the hole is full, jiggle the plant a little to settle the soil. Build a 2-inch high soil ring around the edge of the hole, then water thoroughly.

Watering. Water every few days to keep the plant from drying out. No fertilizer is needed for newly panted rosebushes, but a phosphate root stimulator could be used. See your local nursery for root stimulator and its use. It is advisable to cover the soil, around your bush, with a mulch (i.e. pine bark) to preserve moisture and keep the soil cool. In the summer roses need 3 inches of water per week.

Pruning, Fertilizing & Insect Control

Pruning. Newly planted bushes should not need pruning unless branches or shoots were damaged during planting. When any pruning is done always cut 1/4 inch above a bud on the main stem and above a bud which is pointing outward from the center of the bush. It is important to encourage new growth away from the center of the bush, so that sunlight and air movement can penetrate, which reduces disease and insect problems. Apply a sealer to new cuts, like white glue, to keep insects from entering.

For cut roses, the best time is late in the afternoon, when the plant's water and nutrient content is high. After bringing roses inside, re-cut the stems by first submerging in water and then cutting again at a 45-degree angle. Remember to leave some leaves as they supply food to opening blooms. If you do not wish to cut roses for indoor use and leave them on the plant, remove the dead flowers, again pruning at a bud, so that new flowers will grow. The more you cut, the more roses the bush will make.

Fertilizing. February through October is the best time for producing a regular display of roses. Apply fertilizer to moist soil, 2 to 3 inches away from the graft union, then water in thoroughly. A general purpose fertilizer, available at our nurseries is good, or use a mixture of: 1/2 cup ammonium sulfate, 1tbs magnesium sulfate (Epsom salts) and 1tbs Iron Chelate (Fe-138). Once a year substitute 1 cup of 10-10-10 (nitrogen-phosphorous-potassium) for the ammonium sulfate.

Diseases. Black spot and powdery mildew are the most troublesome to roses. A good fungicide such as Fungenex or Triforine applied according to the directions once every ten days will keep your plants free of black spot and powdery mildew.

Insects. Roses grown in the Valley have few insect problems, but when they appear use the following: for aphids, thrips and cutter ants apply orthene according to directions. For mites use Avid or kelthane according to directions.

(Information source for article: Rio Grande Valley Rose Society, 2700 Atlanta Dr. Pharr, TX 78577)

Article written by the Cameron County Horticulture Education Committee.

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