

POOR DAVID'S ALMANAC

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*"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure
Tend your roses early so that they may endure."*

Getting Started With Roses – Volume V



First Timer's Growing Tip: Fertilize for the last time between August 1 and 15. Why?

Think: Watery new growth vs. early hard frosts = Bad Thing (we will talk more about this next article).

When rainfall totals are below average, you will need to dig into the soil to check your watering needs often. Hopefully you have discovered a good cover of mulch can make a big difference in saving water and lowering heat stress on your plants.

And stress matters, because in this article we will talk about Bad Things that Happen to Rose Plants and outline an approach to deal with them. Basically, Bad Things fall into two categories: Pests (bugs) and Diseases (fungus). Most of these problems and solutions are covered in *Growing Roses in Colorado*. Nursery centers also can help identify and offer remedies, as can our Society's Consulting Rosarians.

Most bugs are members of the Insect and Arachnid (spider) families. Insects and arachnids are probably the most successful species ever to populate planet Earth. They are very good at what they do, and what they do best is eat, and reproduce. Only a relatively few species specialize in eating your roses. Nonetheless, they can do a lot of damage.

One key to bug control is the Law of the Jungle. Yes folks, it is a jungle out there. As with most life on our world, bugs fall loosely into groupings of Predator and Prey. For every insect like an aphid or arachnid like a spider mite, there are other insects like lady beetles (ladybugs), lacewings, and certain wasps that prey on these guys, sometimes at different phases of their life cycles. In a perfect situation, this natural balancing act keeps the number of bad bugs at manageable levels. It is useful to learn how to maintain this balance in your garden. But all too often, factors like weather and human action disrupt this delicate mobile. So what do we do?

Pest Management Tip: In my opinion, the best way to reduce your exposure to insect pests and fungal diseases is to grow the healthiest, happiest roses you can. Believe me, even that is no guarantee. But healthy plants seem to attract fewer problems. When health is not enough—

First Rule of Pest and Disease Management:

You have to pay attention. I want to introduce you to an idea called Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Simply, IPM works like this:

1. Monitor your garden.
2. Notice a possible problem.
3. Identify the work of a pest.
4. Decide whether to treat, and if so—then how and when to treat and start with the least toxic method.
5. Monitor the results of your actions, and continue to watch for new problems.

It is really a simple method. Good gardeners go into their gardens a lot, often daily. I like to wander among the plants before work, coffee cup in hand, to admire the flowers, throw a little water around, and look over the buds and foliage to make sure everything is healthy and happy. It just takes a few minutes. If I notice some aphids on a bud, I can brush them off or smoosh them with my thumb. If I find a lot of aphids (they can multiply very rapidly), I wash them off with a stream of hose water (they can't crawl back). Spider mites also cannot tolerate water streams. Soap sprays work and are pretty safe. Get the idea? Start simply and safely, whenever possible.

The Fungus Among Us: The main rose fungal diseases in our area are Powdery Mildew and Black Spot (look them up in *Growing Roses*). These diseases have no natural predators, except that a healthy plant can better fight them off, or slow their spread. So monitoring is important. Most commonly, Powdery Mildew starts at the top of the plant, on the newest leaves and buds. Black Spot often shows at the bottom, then works its way up. They may not kill your roses directly, but they can weaken the plants to the point that winter will finish them off.

The #1 way to minimize fungal diseases in your rose garden is to clean up year round (old leaves and cane debris that may harbor disease spores). You also can prune to improve air circulation in the center of an overgrown bush. If a disease shows up, you can snip off infected leaves and stems, and maybe spray the plant to keep new infections away. Most fungicidal sprays are preventative (they can't kill the fungus). There's a product called Messenger (quite safe) that bolsters the plant's immune system. Some oils, like neem oil, can slow or keep fungus away. Treatment options range all the way up to fairly toxic materials that need gloves and even a respirator to handle safely. Always read and follow the label instructions on any product you use!

Second Rule of Pest and Disease Management:

Ask questions, of yourself and others, to learn what you are seeing, and what you should do about it. Lessons learned this year will benefit you for the rest of your life. Learn to recognize the beneficial predators, and realize the only reason they will stay in your garden is if there is something for them to eat. Your job is to learn how to keep their food supply manageable.

Learn not to freak out if a leafcutter bee uses a bit of your leaf for her nest. Seal the ends of fresh-cut canes to prevent cane borer damage. There is an entire ladder of remedies for insect pests and fungal diseases that range from doing nothing, right up to serious chemical concentrates that require gloves, mask and heavy clothing to use. Your job as a gardener is to decide how far up each ladder you want to climb to be effective, while staying safe.

Don't be alarmed by all this. The first time you encounter a problem, it can be time-consuming and stressful to learn the solutions. But you are surrounded by a network of people who can help you, and before you know it, you will be helping others with what you have learned. For me, the joy of gardening is as much about the knowledge I can share with other people, as the growth and flowers I get from my plants.

Next Article: In September, it cools off—and sometimes it even snows! We will cover tips to help you start preparing for Old Man Winter.