

POOR DAVID'S ALMANAC

BY DAVE INGRAM, CONSULTING ROSARIAN

"Diligence Dodges Destruction"

Getting Started With Roses – Volume VII



Checklist for Winterizing your Roses:

___ 1. Start by giving yourself a big fat checkmark (✓) for doing a great job this year! You have dug, amended, selected, planted, watered and fed, and monitored for insects and diseases. I am sure you have cut your share of pretty nice flowers. Whew! Well done! Now, let's get your precious little babies ready for the dark season.

___ 2. Evaluate your winter conditions. Do you own a thermometer so you know how cold it gets in your yard? Do you live at an elevation where it gets colder, or along a sunken stream bed where the cold sinks in? Are roses exposed to drying winds and long spells of spring sun? Are there fences and trees and houses around to help reduce wind? My yard has a 6 ft. fence around it, and the neighbors have trees and shrubs that help limit, but not prevent, exposure to wind. Many houses up north near Stanley Lake, where I sometimes deliver mail, are sitting ducks. The wind howls straight into their yards and the only thing between them and the North Pole is some clouds.

Rate the following conditions in your yard by: (A) Good protection, (B) Some protection, (C) Mostly exposed, (D) Very exposed, and (F) Time to sell the house and move.

___ Cold ___ Wind ___ Sun (Freeze/Thaw) (We'll refer back to these.)

Happy Plant Tip: Remember what we said last article, the best way to get roses through the winter alive is to send them into winter as healthy as possible. A robust plant with lots of leaves in October (and a limited amount of tender new growth, mostly at the top) is one I'll bet you see again next spring.

___ 3. No feeding after August 15. Let the roses use up what is there; it will take them awhile in the cooler temps. You will still get a lot of flowers. KEY -Don't encourage your plants to grow when they should be slowing down.

___ 4. Ease back on watering. You want the roses to harden off, but -KEY - Never let them dry out!

___ 5. Remove strong new growth starting from the base of the plant (basal breaks). As fall progresses, consider removing most new breaks from the bottom half of the plant. This will help harden off the base, and remember KEY -winterizing is all about protecting the base of the rose, particularly the first year.

___ 6. Other ways to slow roses down in October: A. Cut flowers with shorter stems or no stems. (Float the flower in a bowl or wine glass.) B. Leave more of the flowers on the plant. C. Deadhead just under the flower head, if you deadhead at all.

___ 7. Remember that as long as the plant is awake and growing, so are fungal diseases. Continue your monitoring and control measures.

___ 8. The first hard freeze will knock down most of the insects, both good and bad, but that won't put the plant into dormancy by itself. "Dormant does not mean Dead."

Tip: Think of dormancy as a process, not an event. It usually takes several nights of below 22 degrees in your yard for most roses to enter dormancy. Even after that, it may take awhile for them to finally shut down.

What I'm noticing is that some of the very winter hardy roses, such as William Baffin and Harison's Yellow, seem fully deciduous; meaning the leaves fall off easily and naturally. These roses usually have bare canes by Christmas. Many others, particularly the half-hardy Hybrid Teas and Floribundas, don't do that. The leaves will droop and slowly dry out, but sometimes hang on the bush until spring. Once dormancy sets in, and the danger of Indian Summer is past, go out and strip the plant leaves and thoroughly clean the beds (disease spores - remember?).

___9. Once you think the roses are dormant, usually by mid-November, pull back the mulch and put a 6 to 8 inch mound of soil around the base of each new, or half-hardy rose. (I put soil around the base of my hardy William Baffin the first winter - just in case. Now my winterizing plan for that plant is to laugh at it as I walk by.) Do Not get this soil from your rose bed (you might expose roots -Bad Thing). A soil mound gives extra protection to the graft or growth point from cold, wind, and sun (freeze/thaw).

___10. Deepen the layer of mulch over the entire bed, to give an extra layer of protection.

___11. Check for the amount of moisture during the winter and deep water when needed. Even dormant plants still metabolize, and roses suffer more cold damage in dry soil than in moist. I use the Holiday Schedule: I go out to the gardens and dig to check for water on Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas/New Year's, Martin Luther King and President's Day. However, water only on days where the temperature will be at least in the 40's for several hours.

Poor David's Hard Won Tip: If you take your trowel and march out bravely to check for water, and the ground is frozen, or there is snow covering the ground -STOP! -you don't need to water. In fact, turn around and go back inside. One of the important lessons in learning to be a good gardener is knowing when to get your butt inside, out of the cold.

The above checklist gives you Poor David's "Dirty Dozen" key points for getting roses through the winter in these here parts. (Poor David is so poor he can't even come up with a dozen key points.) What follows are some extra tips that may be useful, particularly if you had grades in number 2 above in the "C" or "D" range:

1. Wind is capable of rocking a plant until the roots tear loose or break, and the plant dies (Bad Thing). What some of us do with Hybrid Teas and Floribundas, once the rose is fully dormant, is cut the canes back to 2 to 3 feet, strip off the remaining foliage and clean the bed.
2. How stable is the trellis your climber is tied to? Will the wind topple it, which may pull the rose out of the ground and kill it (Bad Thing)?
3. Some of us recycle our Christmas trees (and the neighbor's) by cutting the branches off, and placing them around rose plants for extra protection from cold, wind and freeze/thaw.
4. Some rosarians wrap their trellises with burlap to help protect climber canes from cold, wind, and freeze/thaw.
5. With new rose bushes and Hybrid Teas and Floribundas that you think may be tender, you might place a stake near the center of the bush, strip the leaves (keep it clean!), trim and tie the canes to the stake, then wrap in burlap for the same reasons. This may help if your garden is very exposed.

Don't Get Carried Away Tip: But with the ebb and flow of a Rocky Mountain winter, and the low humidity that's normal here, you can't stop all the damage to half-hardy plants. (That's why I call them that.) A healthy rose will grow back like gangbusters from the base next spring (Good Thing), as long as the base survives.

6. If you've had a lot of trouble this year with mildew or black-spot, consider stripping the leaves (clean!) and trying a dormant oil spray on the canes. This can help incapacitate or kill over wintering disease spores. Ask questions at the store, and follow direction carefully.

Additional Tip: Consulting Rosarian Ellen Nielsen adds a note on how she winterizes her roses:
“Since we live in a windy area, the mulch we use to winterize our roses can easily be blown away if we don’t take special precautions. We make rose collars out of roofing felt we salvage from construction job dumpsters. Each collar is large enough in diameter to circle a rose at ground level and about 18 inches tall. We fill them with mulch and top with garden dirt to keep the mulch inside.”

Next article: “What’s Next?” Your faithful correspondent will try to lead you down the wayward path of Temptation and Potential Rose Addiction! No way you want to miss this one!