

Rose Scented Secrets

Beautiful roses have been a part of traditional flower gardens for many years. They have classic beauty and an unmistakable scent and add elegance to any garden setting. However, they can be a bit temperamental to grow here in Flagstaff. My neighbor has been trying for a couple of years, and he says he feels like his are just “growing in reverse” because they get smaller and less visible as each year passes. His experience is similar to many gardeners here in Flagstaff, but here are some simple ideas to enable anyone to grow beautiful roses .

First, when you choose a rose, know your climate zone (ask us, we love to help) and inform yourself about varieties that are cold hardy and resist insects and/or disease. Varieties, such as Austrian Copper (yellow w/ a bit of red around the edges) and Woodsii (pink) are wild roses that not only survive in our climate, they thrive! Shrub roses such as the Knock-outs and the Nearly Wilds also do really well. Most of these are hardy to a zone 4 – a couple of the varieties are hardy to a zone 3! These are great options for people in most Flagstaff neighborhoods. Even in the traditional tea roses, there are variations in hardiness. Mr. Lincoln is an “old red” that seems to tolerate a wider range of conditions while still providing a traditional “tea rose” form.

Second, be aware of water. Roses don't like soggy soil and they don't like to be dried out. They need regular water during the summer growing season and regular moisture during the dormant, winter season. It is vital that roses receive a good, gradual soaking in late autumn before winter moisture arrives. I use a garden hose on a very low drip and set a timer so I can let the water slowly soak in without wasting water. After the weather gets cold, remain aware of the water situation and supplement Mother Nature anytime we DO NOT receive 3-4 inches of snow at least every 10 days. Even if there is snow on the ground, the plant can dry out if that moisture is not melting and soaking into the ground. During the summer growing season, be aware of how you water. Roses do not like water on their leaves - a top-watering techniques where water lands on the leaves encourages disease such black spot and powdery mildew. The best type of watering system for roses is a drip system where the rose is watered deeply and regularly. This establishes strong root systems and maintains disease and pest resistance.

Third, one of the biggest questions about roses is when to prune. Prune roses in Flagstaff in the late Spring. A good rule of thumb is to prune roses when the Forsythias are in bloom in your neighborhood. Pull back fall mulch from around the canes (Leave a light layer around the roots to help hold water during the warmer months.) and carefully prune off any winter die-back. Then prune to keep the interior of the rose plant from becoming cluttered. This will create an open environment that helps prevent pest infestations. When you are done pruning, begin watering in a slow soaking fashion. If your irrigation system is turned off, supplement with a garden hose.

Fourth, after you prune, apply a rose food that will encourage new growth and support the rose in preparing for the show of blooms later in the summer. A good rose food has a high middle number in balance with the other numbers. An awesome rose product is Bayer's 3-in-1; it contains a great fertilizer and systemic insect and disease control. Apply it once when you prune and start to water and once just as monsoon seasons begins. In late fall, apply Winterizer fertilizer to roses and water deeply. The Winterizer supports the root system during the dormant period and prepares the rose for outstanding growth during the next growing season. Once it gets cold and pests have hibernated for the winter, pile mulch deeply around the rose canes. You will want at least 6-8 inches of mulch, but a taller mound will only serve to protect a greater portion of the canes from the harsh winter weather that causes die-back.

Finally, come in and ask. Many of us have experienced the same trials that you are and we LOVE to talk about gardening. If you haven't been in lately, you should come in and check out our new shipment of roses. They are beautiful!!! We have shrub roses, carpet roses, and even some hardy tea and floribunda varieties. Since we brought in so many gorgeous roses, we thought we would also share some “secrets” for *keeping* your roses gorgeous – even in Flagstaff's harsh climate. Happy Gardening!!!