

Putting Your Roses to Bed for the Winter

by Jolene Adams, Master Gardener - Alameda County

Fall is definitely here - rose hips are getting fat and turning color, the winds are starting to blow, and your roses have put out a spurt of fall flowers to greet the season. But soon it will be full winter and the roses need to go dormant. They need to slow down and rest before starting all over again in the spring.

You should have already stopped fertilizing your roses - - after all, you don't want them to grow new stems during the winter. You should also learn how to put the roses down for their winter nap.

Roses want to stay awake

Some roses just don't 'get it.' They want to continue blooming - even when days are short and it gets cold. In our part of the state, it does not get cold enough to trigger true dormancy so you need to gently calm the rose down and make it go to sleep. You do this by not snipping off the spent flowers. The hormones and enzymes naturally present in a ripening hip will start the rose toward dormancy. From Hallowe'en on just pull off the old petals and let the hips develop. As late December and January sets in, strip off the old leaves so the bush is forced to go to sleep until Spring.



Your rose wants a drink

Your roses will need water, even during the rainy season. You should have a rain gauge so you know how much water they are getting. Since the rose needs about 5 - 7 gallons of water a week (that is about an inch of rain), you will probably have to continue watering if the rain doesn't do the job.

Roses may need a change of scenery

Your rose is going to try a few tricks to keep awake. Even with hips developing, the rose may start looking frowsy and then put out a bit of new growth. She wants you to transplant her or take her out of a pot and give her more room. Changing now is NOT a good idea. Wait until it is colder. Of course, that means in the middle or late winter and in the rain. Stay one step ahead - if you are going to move the rose this winter, dig the hole now and then it will be ready for you to dash out of the house between showers and replant the rose in its new home. Make sure amended soil is piled nearby or is actually in the hole so it can 'mellow' during this fall season.

Some roses turn color

Some rose leaves - notably the rugosas - will actually go through a fall color change, just like the trees. They aren't as flamboyant as the hardwood forests of New Hampshire, but they do react to the conditions of fall by letting the chlorophyll in their leaves disintegrate. Then the other color pigments get their chance to be seen. Most of the time it is tones of gold, yellow, bronzy red or purplish brown.

Nature's wake-up call

Your rose will sleep lightly during our mild California winter. As soon as you cut the stems (during pruning in late winter), hormones are released throughout the plant, telling it to wake up and replace the missing canes. Roots begin to grow - and start making food. Stored food in the canes and anchor roots begins to move up into the bush and the growth buds swell - ready to burst into new stems and leaves. Your rose will be using stored food during this time - no use fertilizing until mid-March.

By early March, small leaves will be seen. Most of the new growth will be reddish or purple - there is no chlorophyll yet! These canes and leaves will start making the green chlorophyll, and as it accumulates, the leaves will start turning green. By mid-March your rose is awake and HUNGRY again!! Time to begin feeding again.

For further tips on growing good roses, visit the American Rose Society - www.ars.org - and UC IPM On-Line - <http://ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7465.html>