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### *MYTHS ABOUT TRANSPLANTING ROSES*

by JOEL MATTOX

Sometimes, a rose just needs to be moved. Could be it needs a new home with more light or water, more room, or better drainage. Could be someone wants it more than the current owner, or that its space is needed for a new variety. Sometimes both the plant and the gardener are moving to new homes. Sometimes a rose just would look better in the garden in a different spot.

#### *Myth #1: You shouldn't transplant roses during the growing season*

Do you have to wait until winter to make the move? Not necessarily. Of course, the easiest time to transplant roses is during dormancy, and if that time works for your schedule that is the best time for both you and the plant. Weather is cooler and damper then, making the job more enjoyable for you and less stressful on the plant. After the annual pruning the plant is smaller and much easier to move around. And dormant plants don't go into transplant shock since they aren't growing or transpiring at this time so the demands on their roots are minimal.

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However, if you find that your schedule demands a rose be moved during the growing season, it can be done and it need not be traumatic. With the proper preparation, roses can be moved any time of the year with great success. I've even transplanted roses in the August heat and they've come through just fine.

### ***The Secret of Transplanting During the Growing Season: Water***

Roses can get through almost anything if they have the right amount of water. Think about the rose before and after transplanting; the major difference is the amount of roots. Transplanting almost always involves loss of roots, since the roots of an established rose go much farther than any reasonable amount of soil that can be moved around. And roots are the way water gets into the plant. So after transplanting, the plant can't take up water as quickly as it did before.

### ***Water Corollary 1: Hyper-water the day before transplanting***

Get as much water as possible into the plant beforehand by watering deeply the day before transplanting. (Why the day before? So the soil won't be mud during the job.) Over-watering is not possible in this case; get as much water in the plant as you possibly can. You'll want all the cells of the rose to be as full of water as possible when you transplant so the demands on the roots are

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minimized for a while afterward. If the rose starts the transplant odyssey already wilting, its chances are grim; water well and wait for another day.

***Water Corollary 2: Take as big a root ball as you can possibly manage***

Take as much root and top structure as physically possible to the new location. Our roses can get very big in Northern California and with a heavy root ball, manhandling the plant around can be pretty heavy work. If you can get a helper and/or a wheelbarrow the job will be much easier and you will have a bigger, more robust plant at the new location. If you must reduce the size of the plant to physically move it, favor keeping the root ball over the top structure.

***Myth #2: You must severely prune  
the rose  
before transplanting during the  
growing season***

The theory behind that myth is that the smaller root ball wouldn't be able to support the large top structure, so whack the top back right away. However, remember all that a plant eats is the sugars produced by the leaves; the work the plant put into making its top structure was an investment in future food production. Why not let

the plant itself decide how much of its top it can support? Removing more top structure than necessary shortchanges the plant. Therefore, you should actually transplant as much of the top structure as you can physically manage. Thereafter, the plant will tell you if it is having trouble supporting its top structure by wilting from the tips. That is a sign to increase watering immediately; any material that doesn't recover and withers should be removed at that time; prune any dried cane tips to a leaf bud, and remove any dead leaves. When this process is done, the new top structure is in balance with the new root ball. Thus, to give the rose its best chance for vigor in its new location, 'you may need to lightly prune after transplanting.'

### ***Water Corollary 3: Minimize time out of the ground***

Prepare the new home well in advance of digging out the rose, so that the plant and root ball don't spend time exposed to the hot dry air. You'll want every drop of moisture that's in the plant to stay there. Optimally the rose should go straight from the old location into the new hole immediately. If this is not possible (and I urge you to make every effort to make it possible) then make sure the rose is kept in a cool, shady place until it is planted. Make sure the roots do not get exposed to the hot sun at any time. If the plant will be out of the

ground more than a few minutes, cover the roots with a damp piece of burlap.

***Water Corollary 4: Hold off on the fertilizer until after new growth starts***

Fertilizers get into the roots in a water solution by osmosis. However, osmosis can work both ways; it's possible to get the soil to suck water out of the roots if fertilization is too concentrated. Rather than risk this, wait until the new growth starts to restart fertilization, and when you fertilize do so with a light touch until next year.

***Water Corollary 5: Water excessively until the end of the growing season***

Roses need a lot of water at any time. Right after being transplanted they need much more than normal. If you see any wilting, water heavily right away, no matter how much water you just gave the plant. When you start to see new growth, it means that the rose is beginning to become settled in, and the high-risk phase is over. At this point the rose still needs more water than normal if you want to support its current size with the smaller root structure it now has. Next season's pruning will balance the top structure with the transplanted roots, and your hot-season transplant will then be just another stunning rose in your collection.

## *General Outline for Growth Season Rose*

### *Transplanting:*

#### Preparation

Plan the new location

Prepare the new hole/bed

Arrange for some help and a wheelbarrow/transport for transplanting day

Hyper-water the plant day before (Water Corollary 1)

#### Transplanting Day

Dig the rose with as big a root ball as you can manage (Water Corollary 2)

If the plant is physically too big to move, remove some top growth

Plant the rose in the new bed immediately and water copiously (Water Corollary 3)

#### Recovery (until new growth starts)

Continue hyper-watering

Hold off any fertilizing (Water Corollary 4)

Remove any withered/dead tips or leaves

#### Rest of Season

Fertilize lightly

Water more heavily than normal (Water Corollary 5)

Continue removing any withered/dead tips or leaves

Resume regular care after end of growing season

***Myth #3: You can't reuse the  
space  
where you just removed a rose  
for another rose***

Actually, any soil that will grow one rose well will grow another well. A good sandy loam with sufficient nutrients and organic material can grow a series of roses in the same location year after year. If the space provided a good home for a rose before, then it will again.

Having said that, do consider whether the needs of the incoming rose for space and sun are the same as the rose it's replacing. For example, a tight spot with full afternoon sun that was just perfect for a light pink little Floribunda might not be the best place for a dark red climbing Hybrid Tea whose dark petal tips may burn in our hot summer afternoons.

Also remember that the space was being used by a hungry rose, and that you're planning on putting another one in. So, after removing the original plant, check the soil in the hole and see whether it needs some amendments such as organic material. Soil tests are a great idea as you now have complete access to the actual soil your new

rose will use. Think about the situation, though, before you add any large amount of fertilizer to the soil; the rose you'll be putting in will have a smaller root ball than it's used to and will be very sensitive to any fertilizer-induced osmosis. (See Water Corollary 4 above.) If fertilization is called for by a soil test be careful to mix it well in the soil and be extra careful to water well.

Best of luck for a successful experience, rather than 'myth-adventures', with your next rose transplanting!

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Webmaster: [gailtrimble@ncnhdistrict.org](mailto:gailtrimble@ncnhdistrict.org)

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