

Pruning Roses

Anybody can prune a rose bush ... it's as easy as 1 – 2 – 3!

In the Bay Area, roses are pruned anywhere from mid-December to the end of February. You want to prune when the plant is as dormant as it is going to get – and the end of the year is ideal. You just need to remember three things:

1. Look at the rose bush. Do you see the old canes and the new canes clearly? Old canes have wrinkled, grayish skins and the new canes are bright, smooth green or mahogany. Start at the bottom of the bush and cut off any old, grey canes, and leave the young, juicy green ones that are larger around than a pencil. Cut cleanly with sharp by-pass pruners. Cut close to the place where the old cane emerges from the crown or the main stem.

2. There should be about five or six young canes left. Now look down at the bush. Can you see the center? Cut off any stems that are crossing over the center of the bush, or are crossing over each other where they can cause rubbing wounds. Cut off any stems that try to grow toward the center; you want to achieve a 'vase' shape. Cut cleanly, flush with the parent stem.

3. Last, decide how tall you want this bush to be. See how tall it is now? It will be that tall again next January, so you can cut off more than half of the length of the canes. Canes on the outside should be slightly shorter than any toward the middle. Find a bud on the cane that is facing towards the outside. Buds are located in the old leaf scars (looks like a smiley face). They may be dormant, like a small dot or already pushing out like a small pimple. See how the bud is angled up? Place your pruners above the bud at the same angle – you should be higher on the side with the bud, lower on the other side. The bottom of the pruners should still be slightly above the bud's position. Make a clean cut.

That's all there is to it. Easy, not time consuming, very satisfying.

Now that the bush is pruned, take off any remaining leaves. Old leaves harbor insect pests and can be infected with fungal organisms. Clean up around the base of the plant.

A good horticultural oil or a dormant spray containing sulfur, copper or calcium polysulfide (good, natural components) should be used to totally drench the bush. It needs to get into the tiny crevices in the bark and coat the stems to smother any insect eggs or fungal spores that are hiding on the bush.

A clean rose will start sprouting new canes by late February at the latest. If any of the new canes are pointing in the wrong direction, gently nip them off with your fingers. You want the sun to shine down onto the center of the bush to stimulate the growth of new rose canes for the future, so keep the center clean until the leaves start covering the canopy of the plant.

Further on-line reading: ["Roses in the Garden and Landscape: Cultural Practices and Weed Control"](#)

Jolene Adams, Master Gardener

