

Roses Bloom Big Time With TLC

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Dec. 15, 2018

Q. I just moved into a house that has several rose bushes. I have never grown roses but hear they can be very pest prone. What can you tell me about their care?

A. Although pests may attack roses from time to time, many rose enthusiasts are able to maintain vigorous plants and produce high quality blooms with little or no use of pesticides, especially in our dry interior valley climate.

The keys to successful rose cultivation are a careful selection of varieties — rose varieties can vary a lot in susceptibility to insect and disease problems, good cultural practices, and the occasional handpicking or forceful sprays with a hose to wash and keep pests off. Since you don't have much control over which varieties you already have, you'll need to focus more on the cultural practices to keep your rose bushes healthy.

Most roses require pruning each winter or early spring. How they're pruned depends a bit on the type of rose bush but in general you should prune out very small, old or dead stems and thin out stems so that air can flow through the middle of the shrub. Make all your cuts at an outward facing bud. This helps to prevent crossing branches, and by cutting at a bud you prevent die back of the branch. I like to cut back all stems to about knee height but do pay attention to where the bud union of the roses is and always cut above it. Also if your shrubs are climbers or really large, you may not want to cut back as far. Once you are done pruning, pick off all leaves from the rose, even if they are still green, and rake up any leaves around the shrubs. This is important for disease control.



Close-up of pink roses. (Photo: Gabriele Ritz/EyeEm, Getty Images/EyeEm)

In general, keep your roses bushes well-watered by watering deeply once per week during hot weather and mulching them with a couple inches of compost. Fertilize every couple of months during the blooming season with a fruit and flower fertilizer that has low amounts of nitrogen so you don't stimulate a lot of fast growth which may attract pests. Avoid pesticides entirely if you can.

Aphids are roses' most common pests, usually in the cooler months of spring and fall. They can be controlled by hand crushing or sharp water sprays to the leaf. Spider mites can show up during the dry months and can usually be controlled by spraying with a hose.

Be alert for natural enemies such as ladybugs, lacewings and syrphid flies, all of which can help control aphids, mites and other pests. These predators won't survive pesticides so limiting the use of pesticides

can help increase populations of these good bugs. To check out what these good bugs look like in all stages of life, check out the quick tip card at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/QT/beneficialpredatorscard.html>.

Leaf cutter bees will leave half-circle cuts in rose leaves but are otherwise beneficial pollinators. They do no harm and should be protected.

Thrips can be a problem and will distort flower buds. To help control them, pick off any affected buds and remove spent flowers promptly throughout the summer.

For more information on how to manage rose pests and disease go to <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/GARDEN/PLANTS/rose.html>

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.