

THE VERSATILE MINIATURE ROSE

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If you think of roses as a plant too difficult to blend into a landscape or mixed perennial garden, try the versatile miniature roses. These plants offer you everything you want in a plant: a multitude of uses, a variety of sizes and colors, hardiness, repeated blooms, and modern or old fashion styles.

Miniatures are hardy and easy to grow. They continue to produce flowers even if you neglect to remove the faded flowers (deadheading). Pruning miniatures is less demanding than hybrid teas and we use varieties that will thrive during our hot summers and foggy winters.

What is a Miniature Rose?

Miniatures are members of the large rose family but are dwarf in every respect. The leaves, flowers and bushes are all small. Some look like small hybrid teas, others have clusters resembling floribunda roses and others resemble old garden varieties. Sizes vary depending upon varieties. Larger miniatures usually grow to 30 inches in height but in our area some hybrids can grow taller, however leaves, flowers and canes will remain small. The average miniature is 12 to 2 feet tall with 22 -to 3 inch blooms.

Multitude Uses

Miniatures can be planted along walkways, mixed with other perennials in the perennial garden, massed as a ground cover, pruned into colorful hedges, grown as climbers on a trellis, placed in containers for indoor and outside use on patios and porches, and displayed in hanging baskets.

Location

Find the right location with at least six hours of sunlight. Planting is the same for all roses. Plants can be planted as close as 12 inches. For greater visual impact, plant several roses of the same variety together.

Planting

Miniature roses usually are available in containers. Dig a hole twice the diameter of the container and slightly deeper than the rootball. Remove the mini and plant in good soil or amended soil. Small amounts of steer manure and bone meal can be mixed with the soil. Remove the plant from the container, gently tease the roots apart. Place the rootball in the hole and add the prepared soil. Carefully firm the soil around the rootball. Water thoroughly until the soil settles. Because the mini dries out quickly be sure you use a regular watering program. Do not fertilize until plants are pushing new growth and have lots of leaves.

Maintaining Miniatures

Proper irrigation is most important. Minis have smaller root systems than their big counterpart roses. Watch minis carefully during hot days. A dry plant will have grey green foliage, the buds and flowers will show signs of wilt and the soil will feel dry to the touch to the depth of 1 inch.



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Periodic fertilizer applications throughout the season can produce bigger plants with more abundant blooms. Slow release granular plant food can be used in early spring with follow up applications in midsummer and early fall. Some growers use water soluble plant food applied monthly during the bloom periods. Be sure to use plant foods according to directions.

Insect and Disease Control

Minis are prone to aphids and spider mites. If at all possible stay away from harsh insecticides and let the predatory insects build in numbers. These two pests can be controlled by washing the plant with a high pressure nozzle, horticultural soaps, light insecticidal oils and systemic pesticides.

Minis can also contract powdery mildew, blackspot and occasionally rust. Use organic fungicides if at all possible. Other fungicides suitable for roses can be used - just follow the directions. To prevent the disease from proliferating keep the leaves dry. Do not use a sprinkler system.

Pruning

Miniature roses are different. Unlike the hybrid tea roses, which are typically grafted plants, miniature roses are usually growing on their own roots. Because of this they will have many more canes of various diameters. This results in more twiggy growth than a hybrid tea and the distance between internodes is closer. This means the spacing between buds is small and we have more flexibility in where we cut and how we prune the rose. A gardener therefore has a choice to prune with hedge shears with good results and minimal die-back, or take time to manicure each plant with small hand shears.

Hedge shears are best for the gardener with little time and lots of minis. This approach works well when certain shapes are desired and developing colorful hedges. Pruning this way may increase insect and disease problems. The plant center can become compacted with twiggy canes and leaves limiting circulation and encouraging pest growth.

Pruning Fundamentals

Have a plan and decide what you want your roses to look like when finished. Look over your rose and select the best vigorous canes. Clean out the center of the plant and remove dead, diseased, twiggy and crossing canes. The number of canes left is of little importance, just so they are healthy and add to the shape of the plant.

The next step is to lower the plant. Generally lower each cane by at least 1/3. Each cane is to be cut back to an outward facing bud. Remove all the foliage left on the plant and clean up all the pruned canes and leaves. Now is also the time to remove weeds from the flower bed, consider adding a granular fertilizer and spraying your plants for overwintering pests.

Finally

Miniature roses will reward you all summer and keep you excited about your garden. You can bring them inside for special occasions, or uses them in flower arrangements. How can you get started? A visit to the Ralph Moore Rose Garden in Visalia (Hall and Main St.) Is the place to start? Mr. Moore has developed hundreds of minis in every shape, size and color and most are on display in the garden.