

SELECTING AND PLANTING BARE ROOT ROSES

Success in growing a perfect rose lies in the gardener's ability to select the perfect bare root plant. Always remember, you get what you pay for. Take your time to shop for the best quality. A stronger, more vigorous plant has a greater chance of rewarding the gardener with more quality blooms for a longer period of time.

Bare root packages: Bare root roses are dormant plants that are sold to a gardener with no soil around the roots; instead, roots are surrounded with moist wood shavings. Bare root plants are also sold as "packaged" plants. Packaged and mail order plants may have their canes covered with wax. This helps prevent drying while in storage or in retail stores. Don't worry about the wax as it will degrade and break away from the canes after growth starts.

All roses are available as bare root plants from late fall through early spring. In milder winter zones (like Tulare and Kings Counties) you can plant bare root roses throughout winter.

Grades: There are choices to make when buying bare root rose plants. Plants are sold by grades and marked No. 1, 1½, or 2 and priced accordingly. No. 1 roses are the best quality and No. 2 roses are the poorest. Be safe and purchase No. 1 roses when ordering by mail or over the Internet.

Canes & buds: Besides grade, there are a few more things to look for. Buy plants that have at least three strong canes and avoid plants that have shriveled, brown or damaged canes. Canes should be plump and green with smooth bark. They should feel heavy. A dried out plant will feel light and the canes may be brittle and have "die-back".

Always look for buds that are plump and brightly colored on the sides of the canes. This indicates the plant is vigorous and will begin to grow when the days warm. Do not select canes with swollen buds. These roses will not acclimate well and will grow slowly.

Grafts: Equally important is the bud or graft union. The site of the bud or graft union is a knot or swelling just above the roots, which should be firm and solid. A soft corky growth indicates a disease, which could prove fatal to the plant or greatly inhibit plant growth.

Roots should be healthy, light colored and symmetrically placed around the trunk. Plants with knotted, diseased or broken roots should be discarded.

When to plant: Try to plant as soon as possible. If unable to plant immediately, remove the plant from its package and store in a cool place. To prevent drying, use moist sawdust or peat moss to cover the roots. Half of the job of growing beautiful roses is proper location and correct planting procedures.

Site & soil: When choosing a location for the plant make sure it has at least six hours of sunlight and plenty of air circulation. Morning sunlight dries foliage and with good air circulation minimizes the incidence of powdery mildew disease. Roses are tolerant of most soils, but thrive in rich-well drained soils with a pH between 6.5-7.0. It would be advisable to cultivate or dig the area about 18 inches deep if this soil has not been worked or cultivated recently.

Roots & planting hole: On planting day, remove all packing around the roots and soak them in water for 2 to 24 hours. Some rose growers recommend soaking roots overnight. This plumps up the roots and ensures a reserve of moisture to initiate growth.

In already conditioned soil, the planting hole should be 12 inches wide by 12 inches deep. If the earth where you intend to plant the rose has not been cultivated, the planting hole should be 18" wide and 18" deep. Rose roots are vigorous and need plenty of loose, enriched soil in which to grow.

Amendments & nutrients: If possible, prepare the planting area by mixing one-third to one-half organic material, such as compost or manure, with an equal amount of native soil. When the amendments have been thoroughly mixed with the garden soil, refill the hole to planting depth with the mix. You may want to fill the hole with water at this point to help settle the soil.

Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup super phosphate or bone meal to the bottom of the hole and mix lightly with the loose soil. Phosphorus is essential for root growth and moves slowly in the soil, so it is placed at the bottom of the hole to be available to roots.

Mound soil: With the amended soil, make a cone shaped mound to support the plant and allow the natural downward and outward growth pattern of the roots. This will allow the plant to anchor itself and support the top growth.

Trim & plant: Remove damaged and broken roots and shorten ones that are too long to fit the hole. A good rule of thumb is to shorten long roots to eight inches. Straggly, overlong roots are inefficient suppliers of moisture and nutrients.

Now look at the canes and determine if you need to reduce the cane length. The ideal cane will have 3-5 buds and be about six inches long. A No. 1 plant will have 3-5 healthy canes. Remove any small or spindly canes. Make your cuts $\frac{1}{4}$ " above a bud eye growing away from the center of the plant and cut at a 45-degree angle sloping away from where the bud points.

Place the newly trimmed rose over a cone-shaped mound of soil and spread the roots over the cone. Be sure the graft union is above the soil. Holding the plant in position, place loose amended soil around the roots. Begin filling the rest of the hole, pressing firmly to remove air pockets, but not enough to compact the soil and damage the roots. Fill the hole to soil level and form a water basin around the plant. Make it slightly larger in diameter than the root system. Fill the basin with water making absolutely sure that the soil around the roots is wet.

Bloom time: The new bare root rose bush should bloom in 8 to 12 weeks. Before the first bloom add a two-inch layer of mulch over the entire bed. Mulch will keep the feeder roots cool and moist, conserve moisture in hot weather, and help keep the weeds from gaining a foothold. Garden aesthetics are also greatly enhanced.

As soon as the new plant blooms, its roots should be developed enough for feeding with a rose plant food. Liquid plant foods work faster than the dry granular, because it is readily available to the roots. New roses should be fed after the first bloom cycle and once a month thereafter. Cease feeding two months before the first frost.



Rose planting tips courtesy of:

University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners of Tulare-Kings Co.

Have a gardening question? The UC Master Gardeners offer free information

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