

# Best practices for pruning roses



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President's Day is usually about the time to start pruning roses.

**Question:** I just moved into a new house and there are roses in the yard. I know they need pruning, but I don't know where to start. Help!

**Answer:** No worries! February is the time to begin pruning most roses here in southern Oregon.

A good day to remember is President's Day – usually that is about the time to start pruning roses and it would be ideal to finish sometime around mid-March. Roses can survive a lot of abuse, but if you want to have nice flowers and strong stems, they should be pruned annually.

If you prune too early, a period of wintry weather may cause die-back of any new growth the pruning encouraged. If we do get an unusual spell of freezing weather after you prune, roses are pretty tough and will re-grow even though they may suffer a little die-back.

If you just can't get to this job until later in March or early



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*Ask a Master Gardener*

April, it will still be better to prune than rather than not at all. Your first flush of flowers will just be a little later.

There is one exception to this late winter pruning: old style roses, which usually bloom once each year, should be pruned immediately after flowering. They bloom on one year old wood so if you prune them in the winter, you won't get any blooms this summer!

#### LET'S START AT THE BASICS:

■ **Tools:** you want to use a bypass pruning shear for most of the job. If you have an older bush, you may need a lopper or even a pruning saw to take out larger canes. A good pair of garden gloves, leather preferred, will help you avoid those nasty

thorns. Your shears should be sharp, and you can use a disinfectant (rubbing alcohol, bleach) on the blades to sterilize between plants to avoid any spread of disease.

■ **Types of roses:** hopefully, you can identify what types of roses you have. Hybrid tea roses are the standard modern roses most people associate with garden rose bushes. Floribunda roses are generally a larger plant and have flowers in clusters. Climbing roses send out sturdy canes which can reach 15 feet and have flowers off the lateral canes which branch from them. They aren't a vine in the traditional sense, but rather are trained up over a pergola, a wall or some other object. Other rose types are the newer landscape roses, old garden heirloom roses (mentioned above), and grandiflora roses (a cross between hybrid tea and floribunda roses).

Let's get started! In all cases, remove any dead, dying or damaged canes. Cut the cane

back to where you see white or pale green pith (the inside of the cane). If the pith is brown where you cut that means you need to cut lower to get into healthy wood. Aim to make a clean, 45 degree downward slanted cut about 1/4" above an outward-facing bud.

■ **Hybrid teas:** These plants usually have a natural vase shape, and you should strive to keep that basic shape. Select three to six strong basal shoots from last year's growth to keep. Remove all other growth, then prune back the selected canes to 12-18 inches.

■ **Floribunda roses:** These are usually a larger plant than a hybrid tea and they are pruned less severely. Moderately prune them to 24-36 inches.

■ **Climbing roses:** Remove all twiggly, dead, or non-productive growth. Only the lateral shoots coming from the main cane should be pruned. Leave about three to five eyes on each lateral.

If all this sounds too complicated or you are unsure what

types of roses you have, seek help from a qualified nursery professional or call the Master Gardener hotline (541-236-3052) for answers to your specific questions.

However, this piece of advice from the Portland Rose Society should alleviate your pruning fears: "One important fact to remember is that no matter how you prune, unless you cut the rose off below the ground line, it will survive and bloom. A total lack of pruning will yield poorer results than any amount of over pruning you may do."

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*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*