The leaves are borne alternately on the stem. In most species they are 5 to 15 centimetres (2.0 to 5.9 in) long, pinnate, with (3–) 5–9 (–13) leaflets and basal stipules; the leaflets usually have a serrated margin, and often a few small prickles on the underside of the stem. Most roses are deciduous but a few (particularly from Southeast Asia) are evergreen or nearly so.

The flowers of most species have five petals, with the exception of *Rosa sericea*, which usually has only four. Each petal is divided into two distinct lobes and is usually white or pink, though in a few species yellow or red. Beneath the petals are five sepals (or in the case of some *Rosa sericea*, four). These may be long enough to be visible when viewed from above and appear as green points alternating with the rounded petals. There are multiple superior ovaries that develop into achenes.[3] Roses are insect-pollinated in nature.

The aggregate fruit of the rose is a berry-like structure called a rose hip. Many of the domestic cultivars do not produce hips, as the flowers are so tightly petalled that they do not provide access for pollination. The hips of most species are red, but a few (e.g. *Rosa pimpinellifolia*) have dark purple to black hips. Each hip comprises an outer fleshy layer, the hypanthium, which contains 5–160 "seeds" (technically dry single-seeded fruits called achenes) embedded in a matrix of fine, but stiff, hairs. Rose hips of some species, especially the dog rose (*Rosa canina*) and rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*), are very rich in vitamin C, among the richest sources of any plant. The hips are eaten by fruit-eating birds such as thrushes and waxwings, which then disperse the seeds in their droppings. Some birds, particularly finches, also eat the seeds.

The sharp growths along a rose stem, though commonly called "thorns", are technically prickles, outgrowths of the epidermis (the outer layer of tissue of the stem), unlike true thorns, which are modified stems. Rose prickles are typically sickle-shaped hooks, which aid the rose in hanging onto other vegetation when growing over it. Some species such as *Rosa rugosa* and *Rosa pimpinellifolia* have densely packed straight prickles, probably an adaptation to reduce browsing by animals, but also possibly an adaptation to trap wind-blown sand and so reduce erosion and protect their roots (both of these species grow naturally on coastal sand dunes). Despite the presence of prickles, roses are frequently browsed by deer. A few species of roses have only vestigial prickles that have no points.