

## HOW TO PLANT, GROW, AND PRUNE ROSES



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How do you **plant a rose bush**? How do you **grow roses**? Our Rose Plant Guide will get you started—with advice on how to **take care of roses** and **prune roses**. We also share our recommendations on the **best types of roses** to grow—and tips on controlling pests such as Japanese beetles.

**Rose bushes** come in a variety of forms, from climbing roses to miniature rose plants, blooming mainly in early summer and fall. One way to group roses into classes is according to their date of introduction:

- **Old roses**—also called “old-fashioned roses” and “heirloom roses”—are those introduced prior to 1867. These are the lush, invariably fragrant roses found in old masters’ paintings. There are hundreds of old rose varieties—whose hardiness varies—providing choices for both warm and mild climates.
- **Modern hybrid roses**, introduced after 1867, are sturdy, long-blooming, extremely hardy and disease-resistant, and bred for color, shape, size, and fragrance. The **hybrid tea roses**, with one large flower on a long cutting stem, are one of the most popular hybrids.
- **Species**, or **wild roses**, are those that have been growing wild for many thousands of years. These wild roses have been adapted to modern gardens and usually bloom from spring to early summer. Most species roses have single blossoms.

Choosing from all the possibilities can be a daunting task. Take your time and wander through nurseries and page through mail-order catalogs and websites.

PLANTING

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**Buying Roses**

- Before you plant, be sure that you choose varieties proven in your climate. When in doubt, All-America Rose Selections winners are good bets. Or check with a local nursery or [Cooperative Extension Service](#).
- If you order roses from a mail-order company, order early, in January or February (March at the latest). They are usually shipped in the spring as bare roots when plants are fully dormant, well before they have leafed out. They'll look like a bundle of sticks on arrival. Note that they are not dead—simply dormant. Check that the packing material is moist and keep them in a cool dark place until ready to plant.
- If you are buying container-grown roses (vs. bare-root roses), plant them by May or early June for best results.

## Preparing the Soil

- Roses prefer a near-neutral pH range of 5.5–7.0. A pH of 6.5 is just about right for most home gardens (slightly acidic to neutral).
- An accurate [soil test](#) will tell you where your pH currently stands. Acidic (sour) soil is counteracted by applying finely ground limestone, and alkaline (sweet) soil is treated with ground sulfur. [Learn more about soil amendments](#).

## Planting Tips

- Plant roses where they will receive a minimum of 5 to 6 hours of full sun per day. Morning sun is especially important because it dries the leaves, which helps prevent diseases. Roses grown in partial sun may not die at once, but they weaken gradually.
- The ideal soil is rich and loose, with good drainage. One of the worst mistakes you can make is to not provide adequate drainage.
- Wear sturdy gloves to protect your hands from prickly thorns. Have a hose or bucket of water and all your planting tools nearby.
- Soak bare-root roses in a bucket of water for 8-12 hours before planting.
- Prune each cane back to 3-5 buds per cane. Any cane thinner than a pencil should be removed.
- When planting container grown roses loosen the roots before planting.
- When you plant the rose, be sure to dig a much bigger hole than you think you need (for most types, the planting hole should be about 15 to 18 inches wide) and add plenty of organic matter such as compost or aged manure.
- Soak the newly planted rose with water.
- Mound up loose soil around the canes to protect the rose while it acclimates to its new site.
- Some old-timers recommend placing a 4-inch square of gypsum wallboard and a 16- penny nail in the hole to provide calcium and iron, both appreciated by roses.

- Don't crowd the roses if you plant more than one rose bush. Roses should be planted about two-thirds of the expected height apart. Old garden roses will need more space, while miniature roses can be planted closer. Space between plants allows for good air circulation.

## WATCH HOW TO PLANT A ROSE!

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#### **Watering Roses**

- Diligently water your roses. Soak the entire root zone at least twice a week in dry summer weather. Avoid frequent shallow sprinklings, which won't reach the deeper roots and may encourage fungus. In the fall reduce the amount of water, but do not allow roses to completely dry out.
- Roses love water—but don't drown them. That is, they don't like to sit in water, and they'll die if the soil is too wet in winter. The ideal soil is rich and loose, with good drainage. One of the worst mistakes you can make is to not provide adequate drainage.
- Use mulch. To help conserve water, reduce stress, and encourage healthy growth, apply a 2- to 4-inch layer of chopped and shredded leaves, grass clippings, or shredded bark around the base of your roses. Allow about 1 inch of space between the mulch and the base stem of the plant. See our [Mulching Guide](#) for more information.
- Roses can be cut back and moved in either spring or fall, but not in midsummer, as they might suffer and die in the heat. Large rose canes can be cut back by as much as two thirds, and smaller ones to within 6 to 12 inches of the ground.



## Feeding Roses

- Feed roses on a regular basis before and throughout the blooming cycle (avoid chemical fertilizers and pesticides if you're harvesting for the kitchen).
- Once a month between April and July, apply a balanced granular fertilizer (5-10-5 or 5-10-10). Allow  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 cup for each bush, and sprinkle it around the drip line, not against the stem. [See our fertilizer guide for more information.](#)
- In May and June, scratch in an additional tablespoon of Epsom salts along with the fertilizer; the magnesium sulfate will encourage new growth from the bottom of the bush.
- Banana peels are a good source of calcium, sulfur, magnesium, and phosphates—all things that roses like. (Note that it will take longer for your roses to reap the benefits from bananas than it would with pure soil amendments.) Here are three ways to serve them up:
  1. Lay a strip of peel at the base of each bush.
  2. Bury a black, mushy banana next to each bush.



3. Chop up the peels, let them sit for two weeks in a sealed jar of water, and pour the mixture under each bush.

## **Pruning Roses**

- Prune roses every spring and destroy all old or diseased plant material. Wear elbow-length gloves that are thick enough to protect your hands from thorns or a clumsy slip, but flexible enough to allow you to hold your tools. Always wear safety goggles; branches can whip back when released.
- Use pruning shears for smaller growth. Use loppers, which look like giant, long-handle shears, for growth that is more than half an inch thick. A small pruning saw is handy, as it cuts on both the push and the pull.
- Deadhead religiously and keep beds clean. Every leaf has a growth bud, so removing old flower blossoms encourages the plant to make more flowers instead of using the energy to make seeds. Remove any debris around the rose bush that can harbor [disease and insects](#).
- Late in the season, stop deadheading rugosas so that hips will form on the plants; these can be harvested and dried on screens, away from sunlight, then stored in an airtight container.
- Stop deadheading all your rose bushes 3 to 4 weeks before the first hard frost so as not to encourage new growth at a time when new shoots may be damaged by the cold.
- Not all types of roses are pruned the same way or at the same time of year. Learn more here: [How to Prune Roses](#)

## **Winterizing Roses**

- Do not prune roses in the fall. Simply cut off any dead or diseased canes.
- Clean up the rose beds to prevent overwintering of diseases. One last spray for fungus with a dormant spray is a good idea.
- Stop fertilizing 6 weeks before the first fall frost but continue watering during dry fall weather to help keep plants healthy during a dry winter.
- Add mulch or compost around the roses after a few frosts but before the ground freezes. Where temperatures stay below freezing during winter, enclose the plant with a sturdy mesh cylinder, filling the enclosure with compost, mulch, dry wood chips, pine needles, or chopped leaves (don't use maple leaves for mulch, as they can promote mold growth).

## **PESTS/DISEASES**

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Good gardening practices, such as removing dead leaves and canes, will help reduce pests. Find out which pests are most prevalent in your area by checking with your local nursery or [Cooperative Extension Service](#). Here are some of the more common problems:

- Japanese Beetles are a common rose pest! See our entire page dedicated to prevention and control of [Japanese Beetles](#)!
- [Aphids](#): To keep aphids away from roses, plant [garlic](#) and [mint](#) around the roses.
- Black Spot: Rose plant leaves with black spots that eventually turn yellow have black spot. This is often caused by water splashing on leaves, especially in rainy weather. Leaves may require a protective fungicide coating, which would start in the summer before leaf spots started until first frost. Thoroughly clean up debris in the fall, and prune out all diseased canes.
- [Powdery Mildew](#):
- Leaves, buds, and stems will be covered with a white powdery coating. Mildew develops rapidly during warm, humid weather. Prevent mildew by pruning out all dead or diseased canes in the spring.
- Botrytis Blight: This grey fungus will cause the flower buds to droop, stay closed, or turn brown. Prune off all infected blossoms and remove any dead material. Fungicide application may be necessary.
- [Spider Mites](#)
- [Thrips](#)
- [Rust](#)
- Stem Borers
- [Deer](#): Roses are a delectable tidbit, so try planting [lavender](#) near your roses. Not only will you have the makings of a nice potpourri, but the scent of lavender will discourage browsers. You can also spread human or dog hair around the garden area or check our [list of deer-resistant plants](#) to protect your roses.

In general, avoid rose issues by buying disease-resistant varieties and cleaning up debris, weeds, fallen leaves and any diseased plant material as soon as possible.

Also, speak to your local [Cooperative Extension](#) or trusted nursery about a spray program with products approved in your state.

#### RECOMMENDED VARIETIES

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Traditionally, roses were notoriously challenging to grow. However, roses have changed. There are now many modern easy-to-grow types of roses available.

Here are some of our favorites:

- Rugosas, with their showy, bright-pink, white, or lavender 5-petal blooms, are great for hedges and wherever a barrier is needed in an exposed or difficult site. They are disease-resistant and cold hardy to Zone 3. Many are fragrant and produce colorful hips. ‘Jens Munk’ blooms through most of the summer.
- Pink roses such as ‘Carefree Wonder’ are well-rounded shrub roses cold hardy to Zone 5. They grow about 3 feet tall and require only a little shaping in early spring.
- Yellow roses such as ‘Harrison’s Yellow’ blooms early, brightly, and sweetly, and will survive Zone 4 winters.

- Hybrid musk roses grow to 5 to 6 feet tall. This shrub rose has attractive foliage and clusters of many small to medium-size flowers. 'Buff Beauty' has clusters of fragrant apricot-yellow blooms.
- Flower Carpet roses are excellent for ground cover. Once established, they can provide up to 2,000 flowers from spring till fall. They're extremely low maintenance, drought tolerant, and have exceptional disease resistance.



*Flower Carpet Roses*

See also our list of [disease-resistant rose varieties](#).

Learn more about [easy roses to grow](#), especially for beginners.

#### WIT & WISDOM

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- Rose hips are loaded with vitamin C. 3 average-sized hips have as much vitamin C as a medium-sized orange.



- Rose petals are brewed for tea blends and sometimes used in gargles and tonics to treat congestion, sore throats, and stomach disorders.
- Rose water is a refreshing skin splash.
- Try a flower facial! Gentle, aromatic steam cleanses your pores. For oily skin, add a few rose petals to boiling water in a heatproof bowl. Make a bath towel tent and lean your face about 10 inches above the water. It should feel warm, not hot. After 10 minutes, rinse your face with cool water, then blot dry.
- Red roses symbolize love and desire, but roses come in a variety of colors and each has their own meaning. For example, the white rose's meaning is purity and innocence. [See flower meanings.](#)
- Roses are also one of the beautiful [June birth flowers](#).
- It is believed that the cultivation of roses began about 5,000 years ago in China.
- During the Roman Empire, rose gardens were established in the Middle East.
- In the 17th century, kings and queens considered roses legal tender for purchases.
- Roses have a [long and symbolic history](#).

*And I will make thee beds of roses,  
And a thousand fragrant posies.*  
–Christopher Marlowe (1564-93)



## RECIPES

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- [Rose Hip Jam](#)

## COOKING NOTES

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The tart reddish-orange hips of rugosa roses are used for jams, jellies, syrups, pies, teas, and wine. Check out our [Rose Hip Jam recipe](#).

Rose petals are edible and can be tossed into salads for color, candied to decorate cakes, or distilled to make rose water. Make sure the rose petals are pesticide free.

## PLANTING TIMES

## PERSONALIZED PLANTING CALENDAR

Customize for Your Location

We use historical data from your local weather station to calculate the best range of planting dates for your location.

