

Poor David's Almanac

By Dave Ingram, Master Rosarian

*"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure
Tend your roses well that they might endure."*

Getting Started With Roses – Volume V (June, July & August)

First Timer's Growing Tip: Fertilize for the second time with Mile-Hi Rose Feed around the first day of summer. Then fertilize for the last time between August 1 and 15. Isn't that a little early? Not really. Organic fertilizers take time to break down and be available to plant roots. Let your roses grow and flower into the fall, but slow down as winter nears. Think: Watery new growth vs. early hard frosts = Bad Thing (we will talk more about this in September). If you use chemical fertilizers, follow the directions for timing, but mid-August should be the red light (I know a few of you will "run that red light," but understand the consequences). Also, when rainfall totals are below average, you will need to dig into the soil to check your watering needs often. Summers are hot, and soils can dry out before you realize it. Hopefully you have discovered that a good cover of mulch can make a big difference in saving water and lowering heat stress on your plants. And stress matters, because it is time to talk about Bad Things that Happen to Rose Plants and outline an approach to deal with them. Basically, Bad Things fall into two categories: Pests (bugs) and Diseases (fungus). Most of these problems and solutions are covered in *Growing Roses in Colorado*, along with other articles on pest management and spray safety. Nursery centers also can help identify and offer remedies, as can our Rose Society's Consulting Rosarians.

Most bugs are members of the Insect and Arachnid (spider) families. Insects and arachnids are probably the most successful species ever to populate planet Earth. They are very good at what they do, and what they do best is eat, and reproduce. Keep in mind that the majority of insects you see in your garden are not harming anything; they are either neutral or beneficial. Only a relatively few species specialize in eating your roses. This is an important point for a new gardener to learn. Nonetheless, pests can do a lot of damage.

One key to bug control is the Law of the Jungle. Yes folks, it really is a jungle out there. As with most life on our world, bugs fall loosely into groupings of Predator and Prey. For every insect like an aphid, or arachnid like a spider mite, there are other insects like lady beetles (ladybugs), lacewings, and certain wasps that prey on these guys, sometimes at different phases of their life cycles. In the late summer and fall, garden spiders in their webs are a beautiful and beneficial sight. In a perfect situation, this natural balancing act keeps the number of bad bugs at manageable levels. It is useful to learn how to maintain this balance in your garden. But all too often, factors like weather and human action disrupt this delicate mobile. So what do we do?

Pest Management Tip: In my opinion, the best way to reduce your exposure to insect pests and fungal diseases is to grow the healthiest, happiest roses you can. Believe me, even that is no guarantee. But healthy plants seem to attract fewer problems. When health is not enough—

First Rule of Pest and Disease Management: Since you have a garden, you might as well pay attention to it. I want to introduce you to an idea called Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Simply, IPM works like this:

1. Monitor (and enjoy!) your garden.
2. Notice a possible problem.
3. Identify that this is the work of a pest.
4. Decide whether to treat (is the problem really that bad?), and if so—decide how and when to treat, then start with the least toxic method.
5. Monitor the results of your actions, kick it up a notch if necessary, and continue to watch for new problems.

IPM is really a simple method. Good gardeners go into their gardens a lot, often daily. I like to wander among the plants before work, coffee cup in hand, to admire the flowers and look over the buds and foliage to make sure everything is healthy and happy. It just takes a few minutes.

If I notice some aphids on a bud, I can brush them off or smoosh them with my thumb. If I find a lot of aphids (they can multiply very rapidly), I wash them off with a stream of hose water (they can't crawl back). Spider mites also cannot tolerate water streams. Soap sprays work to smother insects and are pretty safe. Get the idea? Start simply and safely, whenever possible. Most rose pests can be controlled this way. Target the pest, and leave the other visitors like honeybees alone.

And then there are the Japanese Beetles. They have become established in several Front Range communities in this new century, and are very annoying and destructive. They love to eat rose flowers and foliage, but they also attack several hundred other ornamental and edible plants. Ask around to see if they are in your area yet. If so, you can expect them to show up in late June in large numbers, and decline in September. They have been on the East Coast for the past 100 years, and it looks like they will be with us in Colorado for the foreseeable future. The #1 remedy at this time is to put a few drops of liquid soap in a container of water, and go out early in the morning or later in the evening (when the beetles are lethargic and less likely to fly away) and shake or toss them into the container. They can survive in plain water; the soap will drown them in seconds. You are welcome to contact any of our Consulting Rosarians for some advice and support. JB's can be frustrating; but remember, there are a lot of us fighting them, too!

The Fungus Among Us: The main rose fungal diseases in our area are Powdery Mildew, Black Spot and Rust (look them up in *Growing Roses*). Monitoring for (and recognizing) them is important. Your best starting position is that a healthy plant can better fight them off, or slow their spread. Most commonly, Powdery Mildew starts at the top of the plant, on the newest

leaves and buds. Black Spot and Rust generally begin at the bottom, then work their way up. They may not kill your roses directly, but they can weaken the plants to the point that winter will finish them off.

The #1 way to minimize fungal diseases in your rose garden is to keep your garden beds as clean as possible year round (old leaves and cane debris may harbor disease spores). #2 is to keep the foliage dry. Water early in the day, so the sun can dry the leaves and lower the humidity levels inside the plant canopy. Our naturally dry climate gives us an advantage over other areas of the country. You also can prune to improve air circulation in the center of an overgrown bush.

In recent years, more new roses show up touting their disease resistance. It is wise to look for this when you buy a rose. Just understand that “resistant” does not mean “proof.” If a disease shows up, you can often just snip off infected leaves and stems to manage it. The fungus on the leaves will be covered with spores; be careful not to spread the spores to healthy leaves with your fingers or pruners.

If the disease problem starts to spread, some rosarians spray the plant to keep new infections away. Most fungicidal sprays are preventative (they can't kill the fungus), and generally have to be re-applied after rain. I like to use an organic product called GreenCure (on those rare occasions I decide I need to spray) that can kill Powdery Mildew, limit the spread of Black Spot, and prevent other diseases from getting started. There is an entire ladder of strategies for insect pests and fungal diseases that range from doing nothing, right up to serious chemical concentrates that require gloves, mask and heavy clothing to use. Your job as a gardener (using IPM) is to decide how far up each ladder you want to climb to be effective, while staying safe. Above all: **Always read and follow the label instructions on any product you use!**

How about those products that you mix with water and pour at the base of the plant to fertilize, kill insects and prevent diseases? They may be useful for someone with limited time and just a few roses. But they do have their issues. These products use a chemical fertilizer that may interfere with the processes that make organic fertilizers work. The fungicide may interfere with a type of beneficial fungus that interacts with your rose roots to help the plant grow better and stay healthy. The insecticide may kill off honeybees, other pollinators and beneficial insects. Modern gardeners try to only target pests, and not risk wholesale destruction of a finely balanced natural system. Remember that only a few insects are pests, and should be specifically targeted. Try to only use general insecticides when – and if – you must. It is best to use these multi-task products modestly, if at all.

Second Rule of Pest and Disease Management:

Don't be alarmed by all this. The first time you encounter a problem, it can be time-consuming and stressful to learn the solutions. But you are surrounded by a network of people who can help you, and before you know it, you will be helping others with what you have learned. For me, the

joy of gardening is as much about the knowledge I can share with other people, as the growth and flowers I get from my plants.

Ask questions of yourself and others, to learn if what you are seeing is a problem, and what you should do about it, if anything. Lessons learned this year will benefit you for the rest of your gardening career.

Learn not to freak out if a leafcutter bee uses a bit of your leaf for her nest; she's an important pollinator. Seal the ends of most fresh-cut canes to prevent cane borer damage, particularly at the base of the plant. Learn to recognize the beneficial predators (and their larvae, which often out-eat the adults), and realize the only reason they will stay in your garden is if there is at least a little prey for them to eat. It can be an intriguing challenge to attempt to manage the predator/prey balance.

There is also a form of pruning we do in the summer called deadheading. This means trimming off spent flowers to help encourage the re-blooming cycle. For most modern shrubs, all you need to do is cut off the old flower, and perhaps a leaf set or two. This tidies up the bush, and sends a signal to the rose to start growing a new flower stem. In some cases, you will find that the rose has already begun new growth from a leaf axil or two – that place where the leaf joins the stem. There are new bud eyes in that spot that will sprout new growth. If you see this has happened already, cut to it. Floribundas, Grandifloras and minis often show you this habit.

Hybrid Teas can be a bit different: They usually have upright, vertical canes. There will be a few 3-leaflet leaves just below the bloom, several sets of 5-leaflet leaves below that, and maybe some 7-leaflet leaves near the bottom of the stem. The 3-leaflet leaves rarely produce useful blooming growth, but the more mature 5-leaflet leaves have great bud eyes that will grow strong new stems and flowers. Most of us try to cut to an outward-facing 5-leaflet leaf. This encourages the rose to grow outward in an urn shape that leaves the center more open for airflow. How low on the stem should you cut? That's up to you. Keep in mind that each rose variety likes to bloom at a certain mature height. Higher cuts produce blooms faster; a lower cut takes longer to grow, but the blooms might be larger, and on nice long stems. Your choice.

You can also prune out useless, clogging growth in the center of all rose plants that limit airflow and are only useful for insects to munch on and fungal diseases to grow on. Tidy plants are often the healthiest and happiest.

Next Article: In September, it cools off—and sometimes even snows! We will cover tips to help you start preparing for Old Man Winter.