

Wake Up Your Roses this Spring!

Winter protection of roses can be removed as soon as the weather permits and the rabbits have alternate food sources for nibbling. If you used Styrofoam rose covers you may need to take action earlier, venting them on warm days to avoid moisture buildup and closing them up at night to protect against the low temperatures. This will help avoid disease and fungal issues forming underneath the Styrofoam cover during the transition to spring weather.

Spring is the best time to prune roses, as you can remove winter damage and increase air flow to the center of the bush at the same time, which will help minimize fungal and foliar diseases. Generally speaking, pruning should follow these steps:

1. **Sharpen pruning tools and sterilize using isopropyl alcohol.** Bring a spray bottle with you and sterilize between cuts to prevent spreading disease from one bush to another. Clean cuts made by sharpened tools will also help minimize the chance for infection.
2. **Cut dead wood back to healthy tissue.** The center pith will have brown centers in dead or dying wood, whereas healthy, living stems will have white centers. Cuts should be made at a 45 degree angle, $\frac{1}{4}$ " above a live bud eye. Bud eyes are the swollen nodes located where foliage would connect to the stem.
3. **Seal cuts** with a drop of white glue to protect the open wound from cane borers.
4. **Prune for structure/shape.** Generally speaking, structure can be enhanced by removing canes that are rubbing or crossing, inward growing, or suckering from the rootstock (if grafted roses). Depending on the variety of rose, there are different approaches to pruning to ensure the best flowering:
 - **Ever-blooming roses: Grandifloras, Floribundas, Hybrid Teas and Miniature roses:** These types of roses flower on new growth only. They will take the heaviest pruning in order to make room for the new, flower-bearing growth. It is recommended to remove one half to two thirds of the plant height in addition to reducing the overall number of canes down to the 3-5 strongest, healthiest ones.
 - **Modern shrub roses:** Shrub roses bloom on mature canes that aren't old or too woody. When pruning this type of rose, follow the "1/3" rule: remove 1/3 of the oldest canes first, and then select 1/3 of the best canes from last season's growth to keep (removing all others).
 - **Old Garden/Antique Roses:** The once-blooming varieties will only bloom on old wood. Pruning of these should wait to be done until after the flowers have finished for the season. The repeat flowering varieties (such as Bourbons, Hybrid Perpetuals, and Portlands) will bloom on both old and new wood, and can be pruned in the same manner as modern shrub roses.
 - **Climbing and Rambling Roses:** Climbers are repeat bloomers, and can be pruned in the spring, whereas ramblers only flower once and should wait to be pruned until after flowering. Both will be pruned in the same manner, reducing the side shoots and laterals to 3-6" will increase future blooms. Also, training canes horizontally will help to encourage more flowers.

The final step in waking your roses is to begin your fertilizing routine for the season. Fertilizers designed for roses can be found at your local garden store; however, there are many organic and even home-made options to increase the nutrition to your rose bushes. For in-depth information on fertilization options along with other articles about caring for your roses, check out the resources available from the American Rose Society at <http://www.rose.org/rose-care-articles/>