

Planting Your Roses

Soil and Soil Amendments

Central Florida Rose Society

Choice of Plants

1. Container grown from local growers preferably grafted on Fortuniana rootstock; Dr. Huey as a second choice.
2. Potted plants from local nurseries.
3. Mail order bare-root plants from reputable nurseries as long as they are budded on Fortuniana or Dr. Huey rootstock.

Note: Bare-root plants from department and discount stores are NOT RECOMMENDED.

Site Selection – Minimum 6 hours of sun daily, preferably morning sun; therefore, an east or southeastern exposure. Afternoon shade is beneficial in hot summer months. Avoid tree root competition. If the trees are unavoidable, dig and install barriers about 3 feet deep, or plant your hybrid teas, grandifloras and floribundas in 12-20 gallon containers and minis in 5-7 gallon pots. Bury the containers in the ground up to the rim. If drainage is bad, make raised beds about 18 inches high.

Spacing – Five to six feet from each other, allowing about 25 square feet area for each bush. Excavate planting hole about 20 inches in diameter and 16 inches deep. The easiest upkeep is to make those planting holes in a bed 3-4 feet wide, with only one row of bushes. For two rows, the bed must be about five feet wide and the bushes planted in a staggered row. Planting roses in beds with walks (each 2 feet wide) between the roses is much better than planting roses in separate holes in the field where stepping on the ground (around the bushes) is unavoidable. Compaction of the soil is one of the reasons why bushes deteriorate in time.

Soil – A good soil consists of the following:

1. One-third of any type of good topsoil which may be purchased at your local garden center. Or you can use your own compost if you have any; the soil can be mixed half and half with composted cow manure for more nutrients and microbial activity.
2. One-third sharp, gritty sand. Superior to just sand is a mixture of sand (concrete sand will do) and inorganic soil amendments which include calcinated clay (“Turface” or Kitty Litter with no deodorants) and perlite divided into equal parts. They will provide, beside the good drainage, good water, air and nutrient holding capacity.
3. One-third organic matter by volume. Sphagnum peat moss can be used alone or with finely ground and aged pine bark (sold as “soil conditioner”) which is a deterrent and even has curative effects against nematodes. This kind of growing media will hold water, air, nutrients and provide good drainage as well. To balance the acidity of the peat moss (and also the cottonseed meal, if you have added that), add 1-2 cups of dolomite lime. To supply more calcium without raising the pH and also to help wash out possible excess of soluble salts later on, 1-2 cups of gypsum is beneficial to mix

in. For minor elements, one cup of some brand of minor elements can be added (a pound of fish meal or kelp powder works even better). Successful Rosarians add a lot of organic fertilizers to the planting media such as Milorganite (1/2 quart), Epsom salts (1/2 cup), alfalfa pellets (1/2 quart), dehydrated cow manure (about 1-2 quarts), cottonseed meal (1 quart). The preferences and amounts vary. If organic fertilizers are added, then it is advised to prepare the planting hole about 2-3 weeks in advance, because the planting mix will be too hot (temperature-wise) for immediate planting, especially for bare root roses where there are no buffers of unfertilized mix between the hot mix and the roots.

Planting Florida Container-Grown or Potted Roses

After excavating the planting hole as specified above, apply 1 cup of super phosphate banded in a circle around the bottom of the hole. Do not mix the super phosphate in. Just leave the granules banded together. This way the super phosphate will stay unchanged longer and will not lock up with other soil elements and make insoluble complexes unavailable to the plants. Then fill the hole a little over halfway with planting mix and water to settle the soil. If the plant is pot bound then cut off the bottom of the plastic container and put the potted plant in the half-filled hole and make sure the soil surface in the pot is a little over the soil surface of the surrounding ground (to allow for settling). Slit open the sides of the pot while it is sitting in the hole and slip off the pot and you will get an intact root ball. Fill the rest of the hole to the top with planting mix. Make a soil dish around the plant and water again. A new plant must be watered almost daily (depending on weather) until the root system has been well established.

Planting Bare-Root Roses from Mail Order Nurseries

The proper planting time for bare root roses in Central Florida is the fall (October-November) or early spring (February). Fall planting is preferred because the newly planted rose has the advantage to develop a good root system to sustain vigorous top growth later on. When bare root plants are received, look the plant over and prune back any damaged canes and roots. The plant should be kept overnight in a pail of water. When ready to plant, place a cup of super phosphate banded in a ring around the outside perimeter of the bottom of the planting hole. Build a cone of the soil mix high enough so that when you place the plant on top of the cone, the bud union (these are budded, not grafted roses) should be 2-3 inches above the surrounding ground. Spread the roots around the cone as evenly as possible. Keep filling and firming the soil around the roots until the soil is almost to the top. Water to settle the soil and check to see if there are any air pockets. Fill any air pockets in and add more soil until it is level with surrounding soil. Make a soil dish around the plant, and water again and mulch. Apply copper fungicide spray (basic copper sulfate or Kocide 101). To protect canes from drying out before the root system is able to supply enough moisture, put a paper or plastic bag with some holes in it over the plant and place some wet paper towel or wet sphagnum inside the bag. Tie the open end of the bag around the shank. When buds start to sprout carefully remove the bag. Do not use chemical fertilizers until growth has been well established (about 6-8 weeks). Water almost every day until an adequate root system has been established.