

# Out, Out Dread Spot!

## My Thoughts On Organic Rose Growing

By Lisa Dunlop, CFRS Member

Do you dread spaying your roses and then suffer from an attack of the “Guilts” if you let it slide? Has the thought crossed your mind to ditch roses altogether because you’re sick of spraying? Put away the shovel and take heart, you are not alone. In fact, interest in organic rose growing is on the rise as rose lovers become weary of their favorite flower’s chemical dependence.

What classifies as organic rose growing? Not using any chemical fungicides, pesticides, or fertilizers. But before you start down the organic road, you need to examine why you grow roses in the first place. If you love the thrill of victory at the awards table, are mad about hybrid teas, or are a rose perfectionist, I don’t need a tarot deck to tell me that spraying is in your future. But if you are not 100% in any of the above categories, then my journey in organic rose growing might be just the “ah ha” moment you need to keep you from giving up on roses.

I have been growing roses since 1986. My first rose garden consisted of rows of hybrid teas, the rest of the yard just grass. Following good rose care practice I sprayed weekly, and blasted any bug in sight with various pesticides. I remember wearing long sleeves, long pants, a hat, gloves, and a bandana around my mouth, all in the heat of summer. I recall the sensation when the wind would abruptly change and the fine particles of spray would settle on my clothes and face. Afterwards I would hit the shower and scrub my skin hard, and many times I would have a headache after spraying.

I hated spraying, and because I hated it so much, as the season wore on I would slack off a bit. As soon as I did the evil Black spot would creep back into the rose garden. I would then get so frustrated that I would give up (around late July) and the poor hybrid teas by the end of the season would be sorry sticks. Years went by and slowly my garden began to change. I fell in love with old garden and David Austin roses. I was soon buying more of these varieties than hybrid teas. I began expanding the garden, tearing out grass and adding more perennials in a cottage garden style. I began experimenting with wildflowers and native Florida plants.

Then the moment of truth arrived when I found out I was pregnant in 1992, no more spraying. “Oh well”, I thought. “*Glad to be off the hook ... What’s the worst thing that can happen, the roses will die and that will be that.*” But as the season wore on the roses did not die, some looked like hell, but others did just fine, and most surprising of all some were unfazed - blooming their heads off with very little black spot to be seen! But the best part was how much more I enjoyed my roses, spots and all. After all, the main reason I garden is for my own pleasure, not perfection.

Now my roses are integrated with my other garden plants, which wander and reseed where they will. They consist mainly of shrub and old garden varieties. Today, Elizabeth Taylor is the only hybrid tea that grows in my garden.

After ten years of not spraying pesticides in my garden you would think my plants would be an all you can eat buffet for every bug in town. But that’s not the case. Because I have a healthy

balance of good bugs that eat the bad ones I haven't had the outbreaks of whitefly and aphids like I used to. Having a variety of different garden plants rather than just one type provides a place for the good bugs to live, not to mention lizards, toads, and other friends of the garden. I still have problems with thrips and those black beetles that burrow into the bloom. With thrips I just grin and bear it, and the beetles I squish between my gloved fingers.

Keep in mind that "organic" does not translate to low maintenance, and quality basic rose care still applies. The roses still need to be watered, fertilized, deadheaded, and the mulch renewed. To cut down on disease, select disease resistant varieties and plant your roses in full sun where possible (I have to work around large trees). Space your bushes so they are not crowded (at least 4 feet between them) for good air circulation. I water using soaker hoses, but sometimes supplement with overhead watering from a sprinkler. I overhead water only in the morning so the leaves have the rest of the day to dry, which cuts down on the spread of black spot. As for fertilizers, I admit to using a granular rose fertilizer like Growmor some seasons, but here is my tried and true "organic mix" given to me by our Society's current President "Big" Ron Kast many years ago. At the time I was a rose newbie and carefully recorded his advice in my first garden journal. 4 quarts peat moss, 1 ½ quarts milorganite, 2 quarts dehydrated cow manure, 1 cup bone meal and 2 cups alfalfa pellets. For a great shortcut you can buy this mixture by the bag at Crossley's Nursery already pre-mixed! I apply this mixture for fall and spring organics and to amend my planting hole when I squeeze in yet another new bush.

Over the years I've used several earth friendly products that I liked and had good results with in my garden. In the beginning, after putting the pesticides away, I used a product called Garlic Barrier, which was very helpful against chewing and sucking insects. When you first spray it on your roses it will smell like a bad day at the Olive Garden, but the smell goes away in about an hour. Another product I liked in the beginning (I haven't used it in years) was a product called Wilt Pruf. I read about it in the American Rose Society's magazine. Wilt Pruf is an anti transpirant that folks up north spray on their evergreens to keep them from drying out in the winter. On the roses it would cover the leaves with a waxy coating that would slow down the spread of black spot. It's a natural product derived from pine oil. You would spray your bushes only twice in a season.

I would like to close with a list of roses that I have grown organically (some for many years) that are free blooming (even with a little black spot).

#### Bermuda Mystery Roses

St David  
Vincent Godsiff  
Smith's Parish

#### Old Garden Roses

Maggie  
Maman Cachet  
Pink Pet  
Monsieur Tillier  
Mrs. B.R. Cant  
Louis Philippe

#### English Roses

The Swan  
Heritage  
Graham Thomas  
Abraham Darby  
Othello

#### Miniatures

Demitasse (English style miniature)  
Sweet Nothings (English style miniature)