

## **BASICS OF GROWING ROSES IN CENTRAL FLORIDA**

By Tommy and Patsy Cullens

### **Varieties:**

Hybrid Teas  
Grandifloras  
Floribundas  
Old Garden Roses/David Austin Roses  
Shrub Roses  
Mini Roses/ Mini-floras  
Climbing Roses

**Site:** Select a place where there will be sun for at least 6 hours, if possible facing the east to get the morning sun. Roses love sun! Try to avoid planting near large trees or hedges, especially citrus trees.

**Drainage:** After choosing a site, check the area for drainage. “Perc” test: Dig a hole 18” deep and not too wide; fill with water and check in 30 minutes. If water is still standing, you need to raise the bed. (Roots will rot and plants will eventually die in poorly drained soil). If very sandy you need to slow down drainage by adding organic matter to enrich the soil.

**Bed Preparation:** Well-prepared beds pay big returns and rose enjoyment later. Roses prefer a slightly acid soil, 6.0 to 6.5 ph. A mixture used by many growers consists of 1/3 good topsoil, 1/3 organic matter (cow manure and peat moss), and 1/3 sandy soil. We mix in one cup of Milorganite (sludge) and one cup of Superphosphate in the bottom of each hole. Bed should be slightly elevated to provide good drainage. Allow to settle before planting. Check ph after bed is complete.

**Planting:** Select a container grown rose bush, which has been grafted on *Fortuniana* rootstock for Florida roses. (Roses grafted on *Fortuniana* rootstock can be purchased at several nurseries in the area or mail ordered). Dig a hole about 14” deep, and 24” wide using a garbage can lid as a guide, spacing bushes about 4’ or more apart. Roses need good air circulation. Make sure that the bud union (where the rose is grafted to the root) is 4” above the level of the bed. Water in thoroughly.

**Watering:** Lack of water is the #1 reason that roses die. They require at least 2” of water per week. Water thoroughly and deeply about twice each week, particularly during hot weather. Slow soaking is best.

**Mulch:** Mulch helps keep moisture in the soil, keeps down weeds, and keeps the ground from parching in the summer. Use about 3”-4” of pine needles (our preference), oak leaves, bark, or cypress mulch.

**Stake:** Bushes should be staked properly. If not staked, wind might rock the bush allowing air to get into the soil and may cause the bush to die. Also remove the metal tags.

**Feeding:** Roses are heavy feeders and thrive on regular light feedings. Begin feeding program when new growth begins in the spring and continue every 4 to 6 weeks during the growing season, (more often if light feeding). Several special rose foods are available; make sure to get a formula with *Minor elements*. Follow the directions carefully. DO NOT OVERFEED. Light, regular feedings are the most effective.

**Suggestions:** Use Gro-Mor 12-6-8 and give one-half cup to large established bushes, 1/3 cup to smaller bushes, and 2 tablespoons to ¼ cup to minis. Water roses well before and after fertilizing.

**Insects:** For thrips and aphids, treat only affected area with Orthene, not the entire bush. Hand spray with small spray bottle.

**Spraying:** For blackspot, spray every week. Start spray program when new growth appears in spring. Spray in the morning before temperature reaches 80 degrees. Continue on a weekly basis for good control.

Tommy and Patsy Cullens, 4/04