

# Basic Rose Growing in Central Florida

## By Karen Barnes, Consulting Rosarian

**CHOICE OF PLANTS:** First Choice - Container grown roses on Fortuniana root stock  
Second Choice - Dr. Huey root stock

**SITE SELECTION:** Select a site with good drainage, free air movement around it, and out of reach of tree or shrub roots. East and Southeast exposure is preferred with a minimum of 6 - 8 hours of full sun (shade after 3 P.M. is beneficial.)

**SOIL/PLANTING:** Planting soil should be comprised of 1/3 of any type of good top soil (or potting soil or composted cow manure can be purchased at the garden center), 1/3 sharp, gritty sand, and 1/3 organic matter (sphagnum peat moss is the best choice). Space standard size bushes 5 to 6 feet apart from each other and allow about 25 square feet for each bush. Miniatures should be about 3 feet from each other. The planting hole should be approximately 20 – 25 inches in diameter and 16 - 18 inches deep. Plant container grown roses at the same depth, or a little higher, than they were grown in the container. Water newly planted roses daily for the first two weeks.

**WATERING:** Most experts usually recommend watering established roses at two or three times a week, but that naturally depends on weather conditions, soil, and root system. One may even have to water once a day under certain conditions. Water should go 16 inches deep.

**pH:** Roses do best in slightly acid soil in a pH ranges from 6.2 to 6.5. The pH is the acidity or alkalinity indicator and the scale runs from 1-14 with 7 being neutral, above 7 is alkaline, and below 7 is acid. It takes about 1.2 pounds of dolomitic lime applied to a 25 square foot area to raise the pH by 1 point (i.e. from 5.5 to 6.5). If the pH is above 7.5, then 1/2 pound of Sulfur on 25 square feet will lower it 1 point (i.e. from 7.5 to 6.5).

**FERTILIZING:** In January apply 1 cup of 0-10-10, or 2/3 cup of superphosphate + 1/2 cup potassium sulfate around each bush. Check the pH and adjust it to the proper level, if needed. In January and February you can add some organics to the soil: 2 cups of Milorganite, 1 quart of alfalfa meal or pellets, 2 quarts of dehydrated cow manure and 2-3 Tbs. of Epsom salts. Scratch it all lightly around the drip line of the bush.

The same organics can be applied again in July/August. After the spring pruning in February (as soon as the new leaves are starting to break out), start feeding dry granular chemical fertilizer at a rate of 1/2 cup every two weeks for an average size plant, a little more for a larger one, and a little less for a smaller one. The formulations 16-6-8 or 12-6-8 are recommended throughout the spring and summer (until about October).

From mid-October thru December, only 1/2 cup per month is recommended, using formulations with less nitrogen (4-8-10 or similar). In the summer months, if the top leaves are getting pale (a symptom of iron unavailability or deficiency) then apply chelated iron. Your roses must be well watered before applying any type of fertilizers (even water soluble ones). After feeding water again lightly.

**SPRAYING:** A consistent spray program is a necessity for healthy rose bushes. Spray your roses weekly for the prevention of fungal diseases such as powdery mildew and black spot. Control insect and mite pests when they become prevalent. For blackspot we recommend Funginex\* combined with Dithane M45 at the labeled rates. For spider mites a strong stream of water directed to the undersides of the leaves will help reduce the mite population. The washing of the undersides of the leaves will need to be done on a regular basis until the mites are under control. To prevent spray burn make sure your roses have been well watered 10 to 12 hours before spraying.

**PRUNING:** The timing is usually at the end of January until mid-February, preferably in the midst of a cold spell. First eliminate all the dead and diseased wood, and cut off the crossing stems and those growing toward the center of the bush. The center must be kept open to let the sun in for better air circulation and to allow more efficient application of pesticides. Eliminate any unproductive canes on laterals - those that did not give any good flowering stems in the previous season. Cut back between 1/3 to 1/2 of the overall length of the remaining good canes. Newly planted bushes should be pruned very lightly mainly to eliminate dead and diseased wood and foliage. When buds start to grow, rub off those that are growing toward the center of the bush, or any other unwanted direction. Also, eliminate the multiple buds coming out of one spot, and just leave the strongest (usually the one in the middle). You have to check for these multiple buds all growing season. On pruning climbing roses, just train the main canes horizontally and cut back last season's laterals to the 2nd or 3rd bud from the main cane. When pruning old garden roses (once blooming varieties) prune in the spring after they bloom. Prune lightly to basically reshape bush and remove dead and diseased wood.

*\* Since this article was originally published Funginex is no longer available. We recommend using one of the following as an alternative: Bayer Advanced Disease Control for Roses, or Cleary's 3336, or Banner Maxx, or Honor Guard (generic for Banner Maxx).*