

# Rose Pruning Tips

**“A rose for every home, a bush for every garden.”**

Motto of the American Rose Society

- **February is the best time to prune many kinds of roses.**

If you are still approaching this task with a certain amount of trepidation, it may be helpful to know why this is a good time to prune roses and why we even need to.

When roses break dormancy, the sap begins to rise. The small eye buds begin to redden and fatten. By pruning now, the cuts will heal quickly. If you prune too early while the rose is dormant, the cuts will not heal, and the pith may become saturated with rain, which freezes, bursts the cells, and encourages die-back. This means that you would have to prune again later. If you wait too long, the sap will be flowing fast enough to cause excessive bleeding, i.e. sap running down the shoot after it has been cut. Later in the season, you can prune to groom the plant, i.e. shaping and deadheading.

- **So why do I need to prune?**

A rose unlike a tree does not produce shoots that increase in size. Visualize a wild or rambling rose with a strong shoot springing from its base. It grows vigorously such as Hybrid teas, this whole process is speeded up and can occur in the same year because each shoot blooms. This causes the shoot to complete its initial growth and start putting out twiggy lateral stems.

If a rose remains unpruned, it becomes a tangle of dead, diseased and twiggy growth producing smaller flowers of poor quality. When we prune, we hurry up nature by eliminating the slow natural process of death and attempt to keep the plant young by encouraging the regular development of new, strong healthy shoots from lower down on the plant.

Begin by pruning old, dead, diseased wood. Then remove crossing and rubbing stems. This will open the plant to light and air and prevent wounds that invite fungus spores. Next, Prune weak, unripe stems. They will only produce blind shoots. At this stage, you should be left with a bush with an open center and several bare, but healthy canes.

- **Hard pruning**

Stems are cut back to five inches. This is recommended for newly planted Hybrid teas and Floribundas to build a strong root system and stimulate fresh shoots from close to the base. It also rejuvenates old plants. Hard pruning is also used for established Hybrid teas that are grown solely for exhibition blooms.

- **Moderate pruning**

Stems are cut back to half their length. This is recommended for nearly all Hybrid teas and Floribundas. This type of pruning will produce a good garden display plus some exhibition blooms.

- **Light pruning**

Stems are cut back two thirds of their length. After removal of unwanted wood, the remaining stems are merely tipped. Light pruning is not recommended as it produces tall spindly bushes with poor quality blooms. There are some exceptions. Very vigorous roses such as Pease, Mr. Lincoln and Queen Elizabeth are best left large.

