

WINTERIZING ROSES

FERTILIZER: The process of winterizing hybrid teas starts in mid-August with the final application of fertilizer. Use a 0-10-10 blend, or a similar fertilizer without nitrogen.

END OF SUMMER THROUGH FALL: Stop deadheading spent blooms. Instead, remove just the petals and leave the hips - this signals the plant to harden off. Remove buds, if any. Water well in November after all the leaves have dropped and again on warm winter days.

PRUNING: After the third hard frost or when night temperatures remain consistently below freezing (usually mid-November), trim long canes by half and shorter ones by a third. Don't prune too early or you will prevent the plant from hardening off. Remove any dead or weak shoots and any canes that show signs of diseases. Leave five large, healthy canes on each plant in a basket shape.



Some authorities advocate removing all the remaining foliage at this time. This helps destroy insects or diseases that remain on leaves and canes. Remove any remaining debris from the bed itself. Bag all cuttings and debris and put in the garbage and do not compost. To insure that all insects and fungi are destroyed, apply a dormant pesticide and fungicide after pruning and clean up but before hilling bushes with soil.

Another school of thought is to leave all canes uncut, as pruning may encourage late fall growth and the uncut canes provide some protection during cold weather.

HILLING UP: Just before the ground freezes, mound soil about 12 inches in and around canes, making sure the graft is completely covered. Take dirt from another part of the garden. Don't use the soil under the bushes, as it would expose roots and crown to winter injury. Firm the mound gently. Cover with fine bark, straw or pine needles. Do not use carpet, plastic or grass clippings for mulch. Your objective is to prevent alternate freezing and thawing of the soil mound. (Hybrid teas roses are grafted onto wild rose rootstock and can tolerate extremely cold temperatures, but the graft is the weakest part of the plant.) Use evergreen boughs or branches to keep mulch in place.



EARLY SPRING: When temperatures remain above 20 degrees F begin removing the mulch and part of the mound put in place to protect the grafting bud and canes. Remove about 1/3 of mound at a time. This may take several weeks. Finish removing the soil mound when temperatures stay about 30-32 degrees F.

Now remove all dead, diseased, weak or crossing canes or those growing into center of plant. Prune back blackened canes until you see the center part that is creamy-white, not brown or opaque. Also cut to an out-facing node. Hard pruning promotes growth so be sure danger of frost is past.

MID-APRIL TO MAY 1: Begin using a complete rose fertilizer at six-week intervals. Water in thoroughly.

As with most plants, the best guarantee of a rosebush's survival through winter is good care in the summer, particularly good pest control. A vigorous bush will withstand the cold far better than a weakened one.