



Toronto Master Gardeners

Toronto Master Gardeners are trained volunteers dedicated to providing horticultural information to the public.

For answers to horticultural questions contact the Toronto Master Gardeners' Info Line at the Toronto Botanical Garden (416) 397-1345 (Mon. to Fri. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Sat., Sun. and Holidays noon to 3 p.m.) or our website, www.questions.torontomastergardeners.ca.

Links

Toronto Master Gardener Factsheets.

www.factsheets.torontomastergardeners.ca

Gardening Questions and Answers.

www.questions.torontomastergardeners.ca

About the Toronto Master Gardeners.

www.torontomastergardeners.ca

Book a Toronto Master Gardener.

[www.torontobotanicalgarden.ca/
mastergardener_bookus.htm](http://www.torontobotanicalgarden.ca/mastergardener_bookus.htm)

Links to other Master Gardener groups.

www.torontobotanicalgarden.ca/links.htm#mastergardener

Toronto Botanical Garden

Toronto Botanical Garden is a volunteer-based, charitable organization whose purpose is to inspire passion, respect and understanding of gardening, horticulture, the natural landscape and a healthy environment.

777 Lawrence Avenue East
Toronto, ON M3C 1P2
Tel. 416-397-1340
Fax. 416-397-1354
www.torontobotanicalgarden.ca

Pruning Roses

Description:

Pruning your roses correctly should result in a well formed, vigorous shrub or climber that blooms more prolifically and is more inclined to resist disease and pest infestations.

How you prune depends on the type of rose you have and the type of growth pattern you are looking to encourage. This fact sheet provides introductory information about when and how you prune your roses.

Why Prune:

Pruning is done for many reasons. Pruning will remove potential leaf surface from your plant and as a result, will direct growth in the plant. Pruning is done to remove diseased, dead or damaged wood, crossed canes, and to shape (formative pruning) and thin the plant for better air circulation or to reduce the size of the plant (restrictive pruning). Pruning will result in a more vigorous plant as old wood is removed (renewal pruning) and will also encourage the production of larger or more abundant flowers. Pruning can also be done to shape the plant to enable optimal decorative impact.

When to Prune:

Prune at the end of the dormant season. In Toronto this may be in April or May, just before new growth begins and as the buds begin to swell. Wait until the danger of a hard frost is past or newly pruned tips may be killed. Prune climbers lightly after flowering; prune ramblers after flowering also.

How To Prune:

General Pruning Principles

- As a general rule, if a plant is healthy and able to withstand hard pruning, the harder the shoots are pruned the more vigorously the new canes will grow. Light pruning promotes less vigorous and more limited new growth.
- Use strong, sharp pruning shears to make a clean cut with no ragged edges. Cut no more than 1/4 inch above an outside-facing eye or growth bud. Angle the cut so that it slopes back slightly and away from the bud to allow moisture to drain away. These rules apply to all roses except those being trained to grow along a support and prostrate types.
- When removing a complete stem, cut as close as possible to the parent stem, then trim the stump flush with the stem, using a sharp knife. Cut thick stems with loppers for a good, clean cut. For old hardwood use a narrow-bladed pruning saw.
- When thinning out wood cut back to the next branch, creating a more natural appearance. This avoids numerous stubs, which give the plant a butchered look and invite disease.

Newly Planted Roses

Prune newly planted roses immediately, unless planted in the fall. If planted in fall wait until spring. Prune according to type. In addition cut out dead or weak wood and stems that rub or cross.

Hybrid roses and grandifloras:

Prune hard, four inches from the ground.

Floribundas:

Prune five to six inches from the ground.

Species Roses:

Prune moderately; they bloom on wood produced in the previous season.

Climbers/ramblers/old and modern shrubs:

Prune moderately.

Polyanthas/miniatures:

Cut back polyanthas by one third. Minis are pruned to two inches off the ground.

Suckering

A rose can be either supported by its own roots or budded or grafted onto a rootstock. If your rose is budded, the suckers that grow from below the bud union will be quite different from the top. Suckers should be removed as soon as they are noticed. Remove them from the point where they emerge. Tear or rip them from the main stem rather than cutting. Burying the graft union well below the surface will help minimize suckering problems.

Pruning bush and tree roses

Hybrid perpetuals:

For moderate garden display cut back tops by about 1/3 in the spring. Larger, but fewer, flowers can be produced with harder pruning, as far back as three buds above the base of the stem. Perpetual hybrids bloom best on one-year-old wood. Each spring remove some three- to four-year-old wood at soil level and trim new growth back to three to four feet. Light pruning should be done when flowers are cut for indoor use or when deadheading.

Floribundas/grandiflora:

Tops should be cut back by 1/3 each year in the spring. You can hard prune to three buds above the base of the stem. Floribundas and grandifloras develop new shoots more freely than do hybrid teas, so somewhat less pruning is needed.

Miniatures and polyanthas:

These need little pruning other than trimming the tips back, thinning and removing weak shoots. In summer prune any extra tall shoots to maintain symmetry.

Tree and standard roses:

Prune hard, and shape to provide a rounded head.

Pruning climbers, ramblers and shrub roses

Climbing roses:

Don't delay pruning. These need yearly attention. Some climbers such as 'New Dawn' naturally produce more new canes than do others and will require heavier pruning. Generally, remove all dead or weak wood in the spring. In the summer, as soon as the flowers have faded cut back the laterals on which they were borne to within two or three buds of the main canes. New leaders, which are obviously larger in diameter than the laterals, frequently appear higher up on old canes. Cut back these canes to just above the new growth. Tips of laterals that are too long can be pruned back at any time. When new leaders are supple they need to be directed and tied to supports as they develop.

Ramblers:

Ramblers develop long flexible canes from the base of the plant. These canes do not flower until their second year of growth. Prune soon

after they flower. For each new cane remove an old one at ground level. If many new ones come up remove the weaker ones. Some varieties produce new canes above the base and the old one can only be cut back to that point. If there is little new basal growth, retain the strongest old canes, and cut the side shoots back to two or three buds in early spring. Ramblers are best trained on supports that allow the air to move freely. Prune weeping standards (ramblers budded onto an upright stem) like ramblers.

Shrub roses:

This group includes *Rosa centifolia*, *R. gallica*, *R. moyesii*, *R. multiflora*, and *R. rugosa* that have a tall, bushy, spreading growth habit. These make excellent dense hedges that ultimately require minimal pruning. They flower best on short laterals produced each season on the older wood. Consequently, they are usually pruned only lightly in early spring.

Pruning hedges

The first few years are critical when developing hedges. Decide the general shape and remove the growth beyond the imaginary planes of the hedge's sides and top. It may be desirable to prune after the first flush of flowering to remove wayward branches. Keep the base of the hedge wider than the top so adequate light is available to the entire surface of the hedge. Roses lend themselves to an informal hedge.

Considerations:

Plant a rose that suits your space. If you don't you will constantly be working against the natural growth pattern of the plant, creating more work than necessary, and your results will never be as satisfying.

Be on the lookout for problems such as rose galls (swellings formed by small insects that lay their eggs in the stems). Hatched larvae feed on the inside of the stem causing it to swell. Cut out any unnatural swellings as soon as they are noticed. Cankers should also be cut out as soon as noticed.

It is better to destroy rose canes rather to compost them -- climbers in particular have very sharp thorns. Diseased plant material should never be composted.

Always prune with clean, sharp tools.

References:

The Toronto Botanical Garden Weston Family Library is an excellent source for horticultural information.

- Brickell, Christopher, Trevor Cole, Judith D. Zuk (Eds). *Reader's Digest A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants*. Montreal, Canada: Association (Canada) Ltd., 1997

Factsheets are produced by the Toronto Master Gardeners in association with the Toronto Botanical Garden. They provide introductory information about a broad range of horticultural topics and are intended for personal use and study purposes. Should your gardening group or organization wish to use multiple copies we ask that you inform the Toronto Botanical Garden at info@torontobotanicalgarden.ca.

Date revised: April 21, 2006