

Winter Protection

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A hardy rose is one that has the ability to convert its cellular fluid to a form that won't freeze, "Rosy Antifreeze" if you will. Without this ability, if the sap is still flowing up the canes when winter hits it will freeze - bursting the canes, leaving those ugly, dead splits we've all found.

How do we stop that sap from flowing? By allowing the plant to enter dormancy and rest for winter. While the animals put on their winter coats and we have our furnaces tuned up the rose is making its own preparation. It takes a couple of hard freezes, not frosts – we're talking below 32°F to trigger the plant's natural move into dormancy. At this point the sap will stop flowing, growth will stop and the leaves will brown and fall off.

How do we make the rose go dormant? There are a couple of ways to encourage dormancy in the rose. Primarily, by not encouraging new growth after September. Stop fertilizing about Early September especially growth stimulating, nitrogen rich products. Leave those seed heads/hips on the bush, they will signal the rose that it's time to go dormant. Stop pruning, pruning prior to that will just encourage the plant to set off new growth that will die with first freeze anyway.

How do I get started? The best way to aid a rose plant in surviving the winter is to keep it healthy going in. That means it has been well fed all summer and all soil nutrients are in balance. It should be watered well. You want to continue your spraying program until leaf drop. A disease free rose will be stronger going into winter - makes sense doesn't it? The rose beds should be cleaned of all rose debris to limit disease growth and over wintering of spores and insects. Mancozeb used for your final spray may help to kill any Blackspot spores that might try to winter-over. Keep the beds weeded - weeds do not all go dormant and why should we feed and water them all winter. They do well enough on their own.

Pruning? The most common question I get every Fall is "Is it time to cut roses down to the ground?" NO! NO! NO! Why cut off canes you might save and be able to use come spring. The rose should not be pruned in fall until fully dormant and then limited to only what is absolutely needed. Feel free to cut away any

obvious diseased or damaged canes. You can shorten the canes on all but climbers and only enough to prevent wind damage (or just enough to fit under rose cones if used). Leave all major pruning till spring.

How do I protect them? I recommend tying your rose canes together in early November while the plant is still green and flexible. This gives them support and readies them for whatever covering material you choose. Sometime in December, after the first couple of hard freezes we need to mulch or mound the rose, covering the bud grafts, roots and lower canes of tender plants to protect them. This is one of the most important and most effective practices we can do. The most important factor in mulch is using a product that will insulate without remaining soggy and wet causing the rose wood to rot. Commonly used products include dirt, mulch such as pine bark, and straw. Oak leaves are wonderful as they will not mat down like other leaves; evergreen boughs work great as do pine needles when available. The plants can just be mounded or I like to use collars to hold mounding materials in place. These can be purchased or cheaper yet, made at home from materials such as newspaper, snow fencing, chicken wire or hardware cloth. I've had great luck with a new find, plastic hardware cloth (½" square openings). This can be cut to size with an Exacto knife and secured with a length of coat hanger. Easy to apply and even easier to remove come spring – not to mention easy to store. Avoid pulling dirt and mulch from around the plant as that can uncover and expose the tender roots to wind and cold damage. Also you don't want to cover your plant with dirt or mulch that might harbor disease or insects left over from summer.

There are several ways to protect from wind damage. By extending your collars and mulch to about 12" you can provide protection to at least that much cane. You can protect the rose with frames or boxes of foam or insulating sheets made to completely enclose beds. Other methods include open top wraps of chicken wire, snow fence or burlap which are then filled with oak leaves. Manufactured styrofoam rose cones are made for this express purpose. They come in several sizes to accommodate the size of the plant but... be aware; probably no other subject creates as much discord among rose growers as does the "benefit" of rose cones. When using these, do not apply until the ground is frozen and make large holes around the top to allow air flow (to prevent mold growth and the greenhouse effect of warmer days). I personally have found them marginally helpful finding mold, premature growth, mice nesting, and freeze damage and off-season storage is a problem.

Climbers and Ramblers? Climbers and Ramblers have their own requirements. Canes should be secured to protect them from wind damage but again, not pruned (remember they bloom the next year on that old growth). Enclosing the whole plant with burlap, chicken wire or snow fence works fairly well if then filled with oak leaves or other suitable materials. Several layers of burlap alone can be sufficient for the hardier roses. Spraying exposed canes with anti-desiccants such as Wilt-Pruf may help.

Container Grown Roses? We can stretch our gardening zones by putting tender roses in pots and providing them extra protection. They do best if not allowed to freeze completely and can withstand some low temps if watered well and given adequate protection from wind. Most growers of potted roses recommend an attached garage. Cold enough for dormancy, but some protection from extreme cold. I've had good luck with gathering them together in my unheated pole barn where our horse hay is stored. Provides good wind protection and some temperature moderation from the hay. The potted rose will still need to be watered monthly thru winter.

Tid Bits: When selecting roses pay attention to key words –'Hardy', 'Canadian', 'Northern' etc. and purchase roses that will survive best in your circumstances. Own root roses are becoming more available. They may have a greater chance of winter survival than many grafted roses even with severe cane die back.

Planting tips

1. Placing the bud graft 2-3" below ground level will offer some additional protection.
 2. Watch for low areas in your yard, they tend collect cooler, more stagnant air increasing risk of disease and cold damage.
 3. Use your micro climates to your advantage. A southern wall will produce a bed that is at least one zone warmer than the rest of your yard. Tender hybrid teas may do well here while the tougher shrubs will do just fine in the colder more exposed areas.
 4. Tender roses may not do as well in beds raised well above ground level.
- NO ROAD SALT** Protect your rose beds from salt runoff from sidewalks, roads and patios. From an "aesthetic angle", tender roses needing protection might be better in the back yard.

Rose cones and burlap aren't necessarily fashion statements for the front yard - oh well. Remember that new rose plants, (first year in ground) should be treated as very tender regardless of their adult status. Protect them, they are still babies.

Last thought. I truly believe that if you really love that Zone 7 rose, it's readily available and there's no way you will be able to protect it...grow it as an annual. I've paid \$25.00 for a pot of geraniums, why not a rose plant that will only last one year but that I will love just as much for that season?