

# LATE SUMMER PRUNING IN THE ROSE GARDEN

By Robert Henning

I know, the concept itself sounds strange. I first heard about pruning roses gardens in late summer at a Rose Society meeting, when Dr. Justin Ekuan was offering a presentation. During this meeting he took questions, and one had to do with the subject of pruning and when to do it. Dr. Ekuan told us some of his friends in other Rose Societies had begun the practice of pruning in the late summer, but it was chiefly a means by which to encourage pristine blooms for fall rose shows in the area. He said he wasn't that avid an exhibitor; we thought it all sounded so odd! But, the seeds of the concept were sown in my mind.

Probably two years later, maybe three, I began to "summer prune", but not because I exhibit. In fact, there are many reasons why you may want to prune your rose garden in the late summer, and exhibiting roses in the fall is just one reason.

Initially I was discouraged with my late summer rose garden. In this area, in August, the heat has taken its toll of my garden. The roses are heat-stressed; the leaves are brown-tipped; the blooms open and fall within the same day; and the rust has had the entire spring and summer to infect my bushes. Faced with the daunting task of cleaning up my garden, in the August heat yet, it only seemed logical to cut it back and let nature rejuvenate it! Best of all, it would give me a much needed break after having tended the rose garden assiduously for months. The bonus, of course, would be the bountiful crop of roses that I anticipated in late September.

One person's ideas of pruning may be very different from another's, therefore, a definition may be in order. My "summer pruning" is not as extensive as the pruning I do in the winter, in January. When I "summer prune" my hybrid tea roses, I usually try to cut about one-third of the way down. I think it is important to also remove all twiggy branches less than a pencil in circumference, as well as all apparently unproductive growth and dead wood. I do not remove all the leaves, for that matter, any beyond those which are removed in the pruning process. I also shape the bush and try to accomplish the classic "urn" look..

My floribundas are "summer pruned" as well, removing about one-quarter to one-third of the height, while keeping the bush somewhat full. I remove the dead wood on these also, and nay probable unproductive growth.

I've got a couple of shrubby rose bushes "A la floribunda" that I "summer prune" by removing about one-quarter to one-third of the tip length while shaping the bush. I also have two climbers that I cut back the vertical growth; somewhat like giving the "butch haircut" if you remember those wonderful 1950 hairstyles (now making a

comeback!). How much you cut the climber's vertical growth will be a matter of practicality and personal preference.

My miniature roses are "summer pruned" by cutting them back maybe one-third to one-half of their growth, shaping them at the same time into a ball or compact shrub-like plant. I'll take the time to clean out the dead wood and obviously not good plant material.

The results of these efforts, seen over the past three years, seem to justify the concept. I have wonderful blooms in late September. My plants are not "leggy" looking with vast amounts of bare canes showing beneath a canopy of foliage and flowers because I have pruned them down, reshaping them for the fall. I have better luck with rust and mildew; I guess, because much of the infection has been removed in the "summer pruning" process. Since I rarely spray my roses, it is nice to have another approach to disease control which is more "natural" and doesn't involve gagging me! I've been able to rest for about four to six weeks while my roses rejuvenate.

Only fertilizing, watering and washing them with water spray are required during the period in which they are preparing their new blooms. A day or so after I "summer prune: I give the rose plants a shot of 'Epsom salts', about one-third cup for each. The weekend after, I fertilize my rose plants with a balanced fertilizer (I use 16-16-16). I water and spray my roses often to wash off the aphids, keep the ants at bay, and clean the bushes as well as possible. In about four to six weeks, I have a lovely rose garden, blooming vigorously with an almost spring-like effect.