

EYE LEVEL MINIS

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Give your miniature roses a new look – up high and at eye level – in hanging baskets. The mini stops being just a container rose when its hung. It's transformed into a striking individual, bringing real character and interest up to eye level, which changes its impact instantly. You can accommodate many more plants by employing a vertical design scale, which also helps avoid the monotony that comes with having everything lined up along the ground. In addition, hanging container roses can highlight interesting architectural details of your home, obscure unattractive areas or embellish wall.

When considering placement, you can make use of roof eaves, patio covers, arbors, pergolas and gazebos. As with any rose, ample direct sunlight and good air circulation are vital to the health of the mini, so care must be taken to position hanging containers in the sun and far enough away from structures or walls for them to receive the required air circulation. Properly placed hanging minis will receive even better air circulation than those you plant in the ground or place in containers sitting at ground level.

Growing miniature roses in hanging containers is becoming more popular where space is limited. Those with a sprawling growth habit lend themselves very well to hanging. Some minis are even sold as hanging varieties. The minis and micro-minis that produce dense clusters of short canes are not the best candidates for hanging. However, any mini that does not exceed 18 inches in height can be successfully grown in a 2-3 gallon hanging container. Any larger container is hard to lift and carry. A word of caution however – a lot of birds frequent our garden, and I learned after I had lost a few roses, I needed to discourage the birds from nesting in them. Apparently the excreta from the chicks was too much or too strong for the roses. I enjoyed watching the chicks grow, but not at the expense of losing roses.

The containers you choose should be light enough to move when desired. A container's appearance always matters, but when its function is to support a rose, its function out-weights its appearance. A terra cotta pot will need either a waterproof liner or more frequent watering. Wood hanging planter boxes are attractive. However, evaporation occurs quite rapidly, and for a rose to thrive, it will also require a liner or more frequent watering. Wire baskets lined with sphagnum moss create an appealing, lush green-garden look, but they must also be fitted with a liner and must be watered much more often. In addition, their durability is limited. The recommended containers are plastic or ceramic because they permit the least amount of evaporation and will last the lifetime of the rose.

Use a good potting soil mix that gives the roots the air they need for proper growth and development. The amount of air in the soil is determined by the amount of drainage allowed through it. Hanging containers provide an advantage for drainage as long as the potting soil has the right porosity. I add extra 'perlite' to commercial potting soil mix to reduce the baking effect of the sun and make sure the soil does not pack down with watering.

The next most important element of hanging rose culture is the watering. Minis must never dry out or become waterlogged, and keeping them evenly moist is critical. I have found the most efficient watering method to be an automatic drip system where each plant is watered individually. The watering can be regulated to cycle through more than once a day or skip days depending on the weather. There are several drip systems available, but if you use individual emitters, they must be checked occasionally to see that they do not become clogged. I also use a 'Water Wand' at least once a week to help keep insects under control, wash off dust and help promote a clean, healthy environment.

When spraying is necessary for pests and diseases, it's much easier to drench the undersides of the leaves when the rose is in a hanging container than it is when it's planted in the ground or in a container sitting at ground level.

Feeding your hanging minis is very important because of their restricted root area. I use half-strength on my minis rather than what is recommended for landscape roses, but I feed them more often. Liquid fertilizer is probably the best type to use to prevent burning. Because of the number of minis I have, I usually use a syphon apparatus attached to the garden hose to distribute liquid fertilizer. I occasionally use a granular fertilizer, and again I use less. I cultivate the granules into the soil by using a dinner fork to scratch very lightly so as not to damage the tiny feeder roots very near the soil surface.

Continual grooming is advised to keep hanging container roses in optimum bloom. Minis can bloom profusely as long as they are fed, watered, spent blooms are deadheaded and shaping is done routinely. However, if your time is limited, you may choose the "natural look," which requires you do very little other than feed, water and deadhead. Try letting them just be themselves, each with its own character. If you want a more groomed look, prune out unwanted canes, letting selected canes sprawl, and cut off only the very tips of flowering laterals when deadheading.

Rose canes naturally want to grow upward, but if you want to encourage a drooping effect, pin new, flexible shoots downward. This process, called pegging, is typically associated with larger roses, but the principle can be successfully utilized with minis as well to create dramatic and interesting eye appeal. On pots with external wire support, green twine can be used, tied from the base of the wire support gently pull the canes downward. After the canes have matured in the downward position, you can remove the twine. I prefer to use another method on the stronger canes, as long as they are flexible enough to bend. It involves wrapping a cane with a length of wire one-third longer than the cane itself. Choose a gauge of wire that is just slightly more rigid than the canes to be trained. Stick one end of the wire into the soil and begin wrapping the wire gently around the selected cane. Wrap only enough to shape the cane. Prevent the wire from girdling or damaging the cane. Snip off any excess wire at the end. When bending a cane, be sure your thumbs brace under the curve where the wire wraps, or you may snap the branch, ruining the form or causing damage to the branch. You may have to exercise some restraint when placing the initial training wire, but you can then continue to bend the wire cane a little bit more every few days until the branch ultimately conforms to your vision. Small lateral branches will sprout, grow upward and bloom. Practice your technique first on some scrap branches, to get the feel of bending a cane without breaking or damaging it. This is a useful technique because the wire is barely noticeable and certainly adds an artistic touch. Take care when trimming a wire-trained cane to avoid accidentally cutting the wire or nicking the cutting blade.

Wind, the biggest threat to hanging containers, should be kept in mind when choosing their location. The best place for them during windy conditions is on the ground where the pots won't break and where moisture can linger. Left hanging, the soil will dry out, so you must water them more. I have too many in hanging containers to take down on short notice, so I adjust the setting on the automatic drip system to water two or three times a day, and then I also try to mist them with a Water Wand to help prevent dehydration.

When it's time to do the annual pruning, cut and shape your hanging minis to the recommended 6-10 inches, unless you want to leave selected canes you have wire trained to droop. These canes may grow longer than the wire and turn upward at the end. You can leave them that way or replace the wire with a longer piece.

Raising your minis up to eye level will provide you with an interesting, attractive and artistic display of your roses.