

ADDING CLIMBERS TO YOUR GARDEN DESIGN

by Linda Renfer

TAKING THE MYSTERY OUT OF CLIMBERS

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"Growing climbing roses seems to confuse and mystify many novice and casual rosarians. Consulting Rosarians often get more questions about this type of rose than any of the others. Here are a few tidbits that may be helpful in removing some of the mystery from growing these beautiful roses."

Why should you add climbers to your garden plan? I can think of few additions to one's garden, outside of trees, that add "curb appeal" and enhance the value of one's home more than a few climbing roses. But what if you have limited space? Or just as likely; no other suitable wall, fence, etc., for a climber? As far as room, a climber takes up no more ground space than one hybrid tea – it just occupies vertical space, and is especially ideal for the small garden. It certainly gives one more bang for the buck in the number of blooms.

There are a number of ways to provide support for a climber, but whatever method you choose, keep in mind it must have strength, as in time the climber will become heavy and need substantial support. A trellis leaned against the house is probably the most typical support method used for climbing roses. An arbor, which can be quite expensive when purchased, can make quite a charming statement in any garden. A few sturdy wires strung from eyelets placed near the roof eaves, then tied and anchored to a stake which is driven into the ground at a 45 degree angle makes for a very inexpensive support, and no cross wires are needed. Another method for supporting climbing roses is my personal favorite – a freestanding post for your climbing roses. The free standing post method not only allows one complete freedom in placement, but is quite easy to maintain and allows for ease in training the roses to grow around it. Roses do not climber up all by themselves as morning glories do, nor do they rip off house siding, for they are "learners" by nature, not clingers. Indispensable for training the canes is green tie-tape, which is used to tie the canes into the desired position and direction on the post.

The placement of the posts is the first decision that needs to be made. This is something which each individual must decide as to where the rose post will provide the best effect. It may be at the end of the driveway, in the middle of a lawn, along a walk, or in some part of the garden that needs a lift.

Construction of a rose-post is rather simple. The post should be erected before the roses are planted. All that is needed is an 8-foot long pressure-treated 4-4 and one bag of concrete. Prepare a hole about 2 feet deep and about 1 foot across. The post should be stuck into the hole about 1 ½ feet with concrete all around it, including some under it. The concrete should come up to ground level or even angle down from about 1 inch above ground level at the post to even with the ground at the outer edge of your hole. This can help prevent the post from rotting. While the concrete is still wet, use a level to make sure the post is standing straight, and nail temporary supports to the post to hold it in the vertical position while the cement cures.

During the first season the growth of most climbers resembles that of a hybrid tea that doesn't want to bloom. By fall the first climbing canes appear, and that is when one

begins to train the rose, wrapping the cane with tie tape as tightly as one dares, around the base of the post. The temptation is to tie the canes straight up the post, but don't. Wrap them sideways around the post, going in opposite directions. Failure to wrap the canes around the post can leave a post with a bare bottom. The fall chore of tying up canes will be repeated each year until the post is filled. Additional training by pruning the sides in order to produce short new side growth may be needed, remembering to still keep a somewhat narrow shape.

Selecting the rose for the post is of paramount importance. This is a plant that will be around for a long time. The main reason for care at this point is that the rose canes must be flexible enough to be wrapped around the post. Some of the hybrid tea-type climbers and others have very stiff, thick canes that would be very difficult to bend and train for a post.

Figure at least two plants per post for attractive coverage, and possibly three for greater impact. (In some cases I could not make up my mind and planted two different roses on the same post.) White roses make an incredible statement at dusk or night, while their red cousins have disappeared into the shadows. When planted near an entrance or drive white climbers provide a decided welcome to all that enter.

Today, most of the climbers sold in commerce are either large-flowered climbers (e.g. *America*, *Blaze*, *Don Juan*) or climbing sports (e.g. *Peace Cl.*, *First Prize Cl.*). The large-flowered climbers are, for the most part, slightly more hardy than their climbing sport counterparts but the sports usually have more showy blooms. Ramblers were popular decades ago but, because of their vast size, high maintenance, and limited bloom, their commercial availability has declined.

Climbers need the same amount of sunlight as other roses, so they should be planted where they will receive at least six hours of sun each day. Most modern climbers produce the largest number of blooms if they are trained to grow as horizontally as possible. This is why fences, walls, arches and wide trellises are so popular as supports for climbers.

Feeding climbers should be done pretty much like feeding other roses. The major difference is that more fertilizer should be applied if the plants are quite large. Rosarians should usually double the amount they would use for hybrid teas.

Pruning climbers is, in one respect, exactly like pruning other roses. For the large-flowered varieties, blooms emerge from laterals which arise from canes that are at least two to three years old. This is why these varieties usually don't produce any blooms the first year they are planted. It is best to occasionally remove the oldest, dark brown canes of large-flowering climbers so that new ones can take their place. For climbing sports, the main canes will sometimes bloom the first year and then produce laterals and blooms for many years to come. These canes should be removed only to shape the plant or to get rid of diseased or damaged tissue. When pruning, laterals of climbing sports can be completely removed to encourage the formation of new laterals and larger blooms.

During the growing season, climbers should be deadheaded regularly if the plant repeats bloom. This will help to keep the bloom production high.

Most other aspects of care for climbers are exactly like those for other roses. After all, they are roses... they just happen to have some very long canes!