

Easy does it! Rose “Ergonomics” and Tips- Stu Dalton, ARS Master Rosarian

As I age it's clear I can't so some things in the garden I used to do, but there are some tips that help me to garden, care for 250 roses at 75, and not have too many painful consequences. Gardening helps me get mild exercise. Some of the ideas and tools in this article help me avoid muscle strain, tripping, over-reaching or ladders, and get up after kneeling. I have a few spare parts including 2 total knee replacements, (which means no ACLs for stability), a repaired rotator cuff limiting some reaching, and an issue that causes drop foot. I must use my brain, specific help and better tools to avoid aches, pains, and injury.

Some things to think about in the garden:

1. **Don't trip**, reduce hazards and create aids (railings, easy height raised beds, etc.)
2. **Protect yourself** (gloves, clothing, glasses)
3. **Get help on the tough chores** (heavy lifts, heavy digging, any ladder work)
4. **Use better tools and aids** for digging, transplanting, reaching, kneeling, and weeding
5. **Have your phone with you** just in case

I've learned a few things as I age, and I do get help these days. I can afford tools and “toys” to make things easier. I do have a gardener I've worked with for decades help dig big holes, pull out roots and move large plants, and unload soil or compost from my trailer. But I also use tools to help the ergonomics of gardening. Lifting, carrying, removing and replacing roses, hauling bags of fertilizer or amendments, pruning and getting fertilizer down in the root zone can all be made easier with tools and techniques. I did do a YouTube video on tools and hedge trimmers that is available. Search Peninsula Rose Society YouTube channel or click this link <https://youtu.be/kNS1dLkFZ-M> It covers protecting yourself and some of the tools. I will go into other things in this article

Don't Trip

As you walk around, are the *paths level and stable* for walking? Are there hazards?

Mulch is great for the plants, weed control, water retention, but if it is on the path it makes walking “spongy” and uneven. Consider clear paths with steppingstones, crushed rock etc. What about trip hazards like drip tubing, which is loose and not held down with garden staples? Is it a “trip wire” waiting to catch you as you care for the plants? Have plants exploded into pathways (nasturtiums and lamb's ears in my garden) making it hard to walk?. Just like you look for trip hazards inside, avoid them outside.

Have items for stability

I have a few stair steps between levels. On some I have added railings. In the working garden they can be simple, like PVC pipe anchored on the vertical with rebar driven into the ground, or nicer ones in public areas, I even have some old ski poles in key places for something to hang on to. If you have things like rebar to use for support, put something on top if it is sharp (an old tennis ball, etc.

Protech yourself.

You know about hats, good gauntlet gloves, sharp shears, heavy clothes glasses and hats to protect from sun, thorns, and to keep from damaging hands and body.

I have had a thorn cause a Dr visit to get it lanced, and more visits to have the dermatologist take care of prior sun damage, so take heed of the basics

Lifting aids

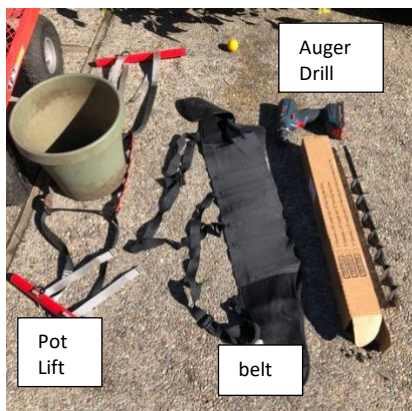
You all have heard how to lift. Use your legs, back straight. But do you twist, pick up from the side, move a large wet potted rose? Be careful.

A few tools I use I the orange wire gorilla cart below, my black lifting belt can help Also shown is something to move big pots, even with soil though it takes two people to use it properly, called a PotLifter.

Avoid injury and reduce muscle issues

I buy Alfalfa Pellets in 50# bags. They are loaded for me at the feed store. To get alfalfa pellets from car or van to my storage area I use a flatbed cart (see the orange cart photo) and wear my lifting belt. If needed I can take some out of the bag to reduce weight.

After putting the fertilizers in smaller containers, to get the pellets



and time release fertilizer in the ground I used to use a sharp stick to make a small hole or digging, but faster and easier is a soil auger on a drill. It gets fertilizer deeper into the root zone. The middle nutrient, (N-P-K) Phosphorous (P) does not move readily in the soil. I drill three, 3" diameter holes around a standard size shrub in the drip line area in less than a minute, maybe 6-8 inches deep. See photo with the portable drill with auger. Put the time release and some alfalfa in the hole and push the soil over it. I did 30 roses in under an hour.



No pain afterwards. The auger is also great for planting

bulbs.

Removing or Moving Roses and Big Roots



Digging with a shovel is certainly a classic way to remove and move roses but I have also used a digging bar as a lever, to work tough soil and deal with big roots. I recently moved 5 roses out of their current established spots in an hour with a bar and a 2x4 fulcrum close to the rose. Especially for roses which are not too large, this is quick. For larger roses the chisel end is used to cut roots as needed. The 6' "Roughneck brand" bar is on top of the orange cart and next to

the rake. A new tool my daughter recommended is a “Root Slayer” shovel (not shown) , is great for cutting tough roots. Very sturdy, serrated sides



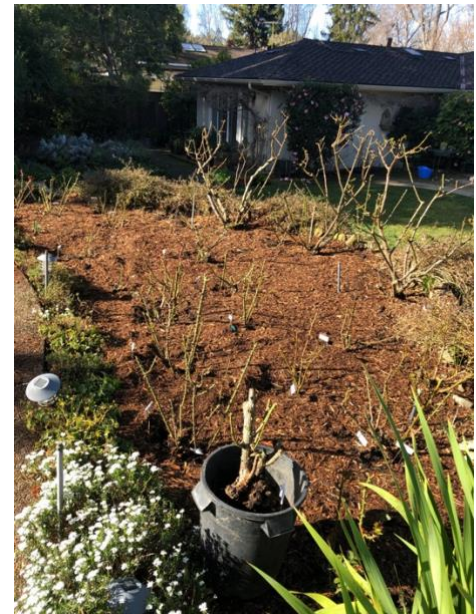
Weeding and Raking

Stooping is tough on the back when you are weeding. The D type/ “hula hoe” second from left on the orange cart, cuts weeds below the surface on forward *and* back strokes. You do have to do this repeatedly (weeds happen) but if you do it before weeds go to seed, eventually you suppress future seeds and weeds. The adage “a season of seeds, seven years of weeds” has some science behind it.

Many seeds can lie dormant waiting to

come up when the conditions are right (think of wildflower explosions). The thin hoe with a pointed end on the left is great for crack and corner cleaning. The rake is adjustable from wide to narrower to get those smaller spaces easily, with no stooping.

Mulching is useful for water conservation, soil health as well as weed suppression. The next photo shows a new layer applied in late February after pruning, cleanup, dormant spraying and application of long-acting fertilizers and organic material, prepping the bed for a strong spring bloom and catching and retaining the last of the rains. 3-5 inches will smother many weeds and the ones that do emerge are often loosely anchored and removed easily. Easily as in less weeding – easier on your back



Other Tools Give You the Advantage The mechanical advantage... to haul, dump, reach and cut without hurting yourself. I no longer get on ladders in the garden. I haul soil and bulky arbor mulch in this black gorilla cart. It actually has a latch, raises up and dumps out the back. Easier than a wheelbarrow. Inside are loppers and “reachers” the one furthest left is a geared lopper so it can cut very large branches. The one with longer handles has a lever and that plus extended arms make it very powerful lopper with little effort. Next to the right with black grippers is something used to reach things on shelves and in the garden, I use it for arranging higher canes on climbers. The long clipper with orange handles is a cut-and-hold type which can prune tall canes or cut and retrieve higher blooms during the growing season. On the far-right top edge of the black cart are #7 Felco pruners, the fatter, lower handle rotates as you squeeze giving the fingers a more natural motion, making it easier on the hand. Of course, like all pruners sharpen them frequently for least effort in pruning or cutting. And on the bottom right is a Scott rechargeable electric pruner. I’m not using it much yet, but it also has an extension to reach higher branches.



Getting down and dirty

Actually, ...getting up and staying cleaner. The padded kneeling bench shown keeps knees off the ground (helpful with two total knee replacements) and is also very helpful getting back up. And as a plus if you flip it upside down you can sit on it and work on that mini rose without strain.



Have your phone just in case

My iPhone knows if it “thinks” I fall. If you also have an Apple watch the combination can be helpful. If you fall hard and you don’t respond to it saying “did you fall, and I’m all right or did not fall it sends a message to emergency contacts. Sometimes it thinks I fall when the watch moves and stops (hammering is an example). If you have these, use them. It may be as good as life alert. If not and you have your regular call phone it still can help you call if you have an accident.

So...easy does it, happy gardening!