

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE ALL DONE

Even this late in the season there are a few gardening tasks that are important. This cool time just before nasty weather really sets in is a good time to prepare your roses for winter. Hardy roses don't require much care, but the more tender ones need protection from extremely low temperatures and fluctuating temperatures, especially in the spring. Healthy roses are less vulnerable to winter damage, but those plants that have lost their leaves early in the fall because of disease or nutrient deficiencies are more susceptible and need more care going into the winter.

The easiest form of protection is mounding. Cut the canes back to eight to twelve inches. Cover them completely with soil and then cover the mound with a couple feet of leaves or straw. A chicken wire cylinder around individual plants will keep the leaves or straw from blowing away. A bed of several roses might be more easily handled by a corral of chicken wire put around the whole bed and then filled with leaves or straw. For either a cylinder or a corral the chicken wire sides need to be kept upright with tall stakes pounded into the soil every 2-3 feet just inside the sides. Then the chicken wire can be fastened to the stakes with twist ties, flexible wire, or some other sort of tie. Mounding is suitable if you are not concerned with preserving the whole canes and/or if there is no room to dig trenches for tipping the plants.

To tip roses, first tie the canes together. Then dig a trench out from the base deep enough and long enough to accommodate the canes. Loosen up the soil around the roots with a garden fork and then push the whole plant over into the trench. Shovel the soil that was dug out of the trench back in to cover the plant. Then add leaves or straw over the plant in a corral just like is done for mounding.

In the spring reverse the process as everything thaws out.

At the Virginia Clemens Rose Garden, St Cloud, they cut each shrub back to 8 inches and cover it with several shovel scoops of compost. Then they cover each rose bed with insulated construction blankets (which are ordinarily used in the curing of concrete projects during the winter). When the blankets were removed in prior years during the second week of April many of the plants were already green and sprouting new growth.

You may notice as you drive around now that many shrubs still have green leaves and that many of them have black berries. These are most likely the infamous buckthorn. If you have the opportunity, now is a good time to pull them out or saw them down and immediately treat the stumps with concentrated glyphosate (Roundup). Attacking these pests now is a favorable time because they are one of the few plants that still have green leaves so you will be less likely to take out a more desirable shrub or small tree by mistake. One of the reasons why buckthorn can out compete our native shrubs is due to their ability to keep producing energy in their leaves this late in the season.

Pay attention to how much precipitation we are getting this month. If we are not getting much rain or melting snow it is a good idea to thoroughly water all of your perennial plants, shrubs and trees. This step is especially important for those plants which have only been put in place in the last couple years. Don't forget your roses, no matter how many years it has been since they were planted. The process of tipping or cutting back canes is in itself stressing to the plants so they need some extra hydration. Evergreens also need watering because they can lose a lot of water through their needles or scales that cannot be replaced after the ground freezes.

Another last minute task that can be done now is to oversee the bare or sparse spaces in your lawn in a process called "dormant seeding." After you remove the leaves that have fallen on your lawn scatter grass seed and lightly rake it into the bare ground. If it doesn't rain before the ground freezes, lightly water the seed in. These seeds will not sprout now, but will be ready to do so in the spring.

Happy Gardening, Jennifer Porwit

REFERENCES:

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