

## Pre-Winter Rose Care

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Fall is a time when we try to strike a balance between enjoying some of the last blooms of the season and preparing our roses for the coming winter so that we will have nice roses next year. What to do and when to do it can depend on whether you expect another mild winter or a more normal winter when the ground can be frozen by December 1st with extended periods of sub-zero temperatures during the winter. Also, depending upon your tolerance for working outside when it may be cold and damp or even snowy, may require that you adjust the time frames discussed below for preparing your roses for winter.

### First Three (+) Weeks of October

Start of the “fall hardening off” process.

Contrary to the spring when we “harden off” plants to get them used to outside weather conditions, “fall hardening off” for repeat blooming roses is being defined as sending messages to the rose bushes telling them to slacken off on their reproduction efforts (producing new growth and blooms) and saving their energy to survive the coming winter and then bloom again next year.

To start. Leave the spent blooms on the bushes. Allow petals to drop off or pull them off (if you prefer), but leave what may become a “hip” (where the bud first started). Limit the number of roses that you cut to just a few--mostly for your enjoyment. Do not cut the rest of the stems at this time.

Disease/insect control. Spraying now is optional. If you do not plan to strip the leaves and remove debris from the rose beds (which I do later), it is suggested that you spray now to reduce disease and insect carryover through the winter to next spring.

### Late October to Mid-November

Expanding the “fall hardening off” process.

Continue: Leave spent blooms on the bushes and just cut a very limited number of blooms for your enjoyment. Do not cut the rest of the stems at this time.

Start: Start removing the leaves from the bottom of the bush working upward at a rate of a few inches each week so that you will have removed the lower leaves up to 20” to 25” above ground level. This should help discourage new growth that will not harden off before winter.

If you will be cutting your modern type roses (hybrid teas, floribundas, grandifloras) back for the winter, this will be done later. For miniatures, removal of foliage at this time can be difficult but can be done later when the bushes are cut back. For climbers and most shrubs (sometimes also referred to as landscape roses), you can remove more of the lower leaves, as cutting back of these types of bushes should be limited (if done at all).

Mid-November through early December

Final Preparation for a Cold Winter.

By mid-to-late November, most of the modern type roses should be pretty well “hardened off” and be ready for their winter protection. Keys to successful winter care include: (a) Keeping the roses cold; (b) Thoroughly watering and retaining moisture in the roots and canes; and (c) Reducing disease and insect carryover during the winter.

Before the ground surface starts to freeze: (a) Strip off leaves that will not be removed when cutting back the bushes. Then clean old leaves, petals, and other debris out of your rose beds. (b) Add 4” to 5” of soil to miniature roses and 8” to 10” of soil above the bud union of hybrid teas, floribundas, grandifloras, climbers, and most shrubs. (c) If you will be using rose cones for hybrid teas, floribundas and grandifloras, tie the canes together (about 15 inches above ground level to fit under the rose cones). (d) If you will not be cutting these back, at least tie the canes together to reduce wind damage and rocking of roots out of the soil during a winter thaw. (e) Spray with a dormant spray or your regular spray. I like to mix the fungicide and insecticide sprays at double strength in a watering can and thoroughly soak the bushes and the rose beds before the ground freezes hard. This can be a good time to use up your oldest spray materials whose shelf life is running out.

If you would like to use less soil for mounding, you can mix peat moss, compost, well-rotted manure or similar materials with the soil or use any of these instead of soil. For climbers, partially bend them over (about at a 45 degree angle) and shield with cardboard, styrofoam, or similar material to reduce drying by the winter sun and wind. If you prefer, you can leave climbers in place and wrap with burlap, but this may not give you as much protection as a more solid material. You might also consider applying an anti-transpirant such as Wilt Pruf to reduce drying of canes by wind and sun.

**SPECIAL NOTES:** Do not take soil for mounding from the rose beds, as doing so may expose the roots to winter damage. Unless you have a lot of rain during November, thoroughly soak the rose beds (and other shrubs and perennials) before the ground freezes to the point that water will not soak into the soil.

After the ground starts to freeze hard (late November – early December): Cut off the tops of the large type roses (hybrid teas, floribundas, grandifloras, etc.) and miniatures and add the rose cones or other winter covering. If you will be using something instead of rose cones (i.e., wire or paper or other form of wrapping), add additional fill or other winter protection up to 15” or 20” above ground.

Should you want to use leaves as a filler around the roses, use oak leaves only, as other types of leaves compact too much and may form an ice block during the winter. Most shrub, climber, and old garden type roses do not need to be cut back for the winter.

