

December in the Garden

We are finally experiencing some colder temperatures. In fact, we have already had some hard freezes which has just about shut down our roses for the season. Oh well, we can always look forward to next spring when we will hopefully have some nice blooms again.

December is the time we should start thinking about winterizing our garden. Winterizing in our garden mainly consists of cleaning up the garden and protecting new plants that were planted this past season. Cleaning up our garden begins with getting all of the winter weeds out of our rose beds. So far, we have been able to keep the winter weeds pretty much under control by applying a thick layer of mulch, such as pine bark mini-nuggets. However, if you have not mulched, I am pretty sure you will have weeds before too long. We have made it a priority to keep the winter weeds under control so we won't have to deal with them when we do our spring pruning in March. Weeding is not a fun job and may take some effort, but believe me, it is well worth it. While you are out digging and pulling weeds, it is also a good time to pick off any foliage that may have blackspot. When the weeding is complete, we have found it helpful to apply some pre-emergent weed control, such as Preen to help keep new weed seeds from sprouting. Finally, we also look for any dead or diseased canes that need to be removed and cut them out.

Now that we have had some hard freezes with temperatures at 28 degrees Fahrenheit or lower, we can cut our taller bushes back to about four feet or so tall. We will probably start doing this the later part of December. Cutting the tall canes back will help prevent them from whipping around in the winter wind. **Do not prune your plants any more than this until March.** Cutting your bushes back more than this now can cause problems if we have a few warm days, as your plants might start trying to grow again only to be damaged by colder weather as we go through the winter.

Sometime during December, we pick a nice day when the temperature is above freezing (preferably in the fifties) and apply a lime sulfur dormant spray. You can possibly find this product at your favorite lawn and garden store. Carefully read the label and mix the spray at the dormant rate. Spray your plants and the surrounding area liberally. The lime sulfur spray will help to kill any disease spores and insect eggs that might otherwise survive the winter and attack your roses next spring.

We finish our winter preparation by applying some extra winter protection to the plants that were introduced to our garden over the course of this past season. The extra protection that we like to use is a thick mulch carefully placed around and over the bud union to keep it from freezing. You can use a variety of materials to provide this protection, such as pine bark, mushroom compost, oak leaves, or loose topsoil that is bought in from another part of the garden. We prefer to use pine bark mini-nuggets, which is readily available in this area. The pine bark is easy to apply and will also do a nice job of controlling winter weeds. Regardless of the material that you choose, be sure to mound it at least 12 inches or more above the bud union. We are not applying

the protection to keep the soil warm, but rather to keep it at a more constant temperature.

This is a great time to have a soil test of your rose garden. Doing it now will allow you to make any necessary adjustments. Remember that roses like a slightly acid pH generally between 6.2 and 6.7. If the pH is below 6.2, go ahead and apply some dolomitic lime now. Your soil should then be “good to go” come spring.

If you haven't already done so, now is a great time to take stock of your garden and review how your roses performed. If you have bushes that have not lived up to your expectations, go ahead and dig them up now. If possible, amend the soil where the discarded plants were growing with lots of organics. The amended soil will then be ready for the new roses when you get them in the spring. Speaking of new roses, winter is a great time to do some research on any new varieties that you may be considering. Too often we see a plant with a pretty bloom at the nursery and just buy it without knowing much about it. Do your research and get all the information you can about which varieties do best for your garden situation. If possible, buy your plants locally so you can see what you are getting.

Finally, it is time to sit back and try to enjoy the holidays. If you're still looking for a gift for any of your gardening friends, why not consider giving a gift certificate for a rose bush from your favorite local garden center? Better still, give a membership to our club!

The Tri-State Rose Society of Chattanooga wishes everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy Rose Year!