

February in the Rose Garden

Now that February is here, hopefully spring is just around the corner. With January brought a mixture of rain and some occasional colder temperatures, which should not have been too hard on our roses. However, the December deep freeze may have done some damage.

We will not know how our roses survived the winter until we start to prune in March. It is possible that we won't know for sure until April, when our roses should start actively growing again. Several rosarians have noticed some damaged "black" canes. Canes that are completely black are in fact dead. However, it is possible that only the upper part of a cane is black, which means that you may be able to salvage the good green lower part of a cane.

February weather in the Tri-State area can be very tricky, as we usually have a few very cold days followed closely by some very warm days. It has been our experience that most of the winter damage to our roses has been done when we have cold weather followed by warm weather and vice versa.

After this rainy and rather drab winter, many rosarians are no doubt anxious to get back out in the garden and begin pruning our roses for the coming season. If you are thinking about pruning in February, please keep in mind that pruning your roses will signal them to start growing. Without fail, we will have some more cold temperatures and if your roses have started growing, they will surely be damaged. If you are a "tip" pruner, which means you primarily snip off the tips and remove dead wood, then pruning in February might be okay because if we do have a damaging freeze, you will still have wood to re-prune down to. However, if you are like us and more severely prune your roses, then pruning in February can be risky, which is why we recommend that you not prune your roses in our area until the first part of March.

There are some chores that can be accomplished in February. If you failed to get it done in the fall, now is a good time to check your soil pH. More than likely, we think you will find that with all of the rain we have experienced in January, the pH of most of our rose beds will be on the acid side. While checking the pH may seem like a trivial matter, if the soil pH is not correct, our roses will simply not grow and bloom to their full potential. Remember, roses like a pH between 6.0 and 6.5, which is

slightly on the acid side. Make sure your pH is good to go for the upcoming spring. If you are not sure how to get a soil sample to check pH, please consider coming to our February 19 meeting as our guest speaker is the former Hamilton County extension agent, Tom Stebbins. He will be presenting a program on how to take a soil sample, where to send, and how to decipher the results. We meet at the Trinity Lutheran Church in Hixson. We have light refreshments at 2:00 pm followed by the program at 2:30 PM.

It is also a good idea to pick a warm day, and spray your roses with a dormant spray of liquid lime-sulfur. This will help kill any disease spores that might be trying to over-winter in your garden. Be very liberal with your application and spray the ground around the plants as well as the plants. Spraying with lime-sulfur now will help ensure that your roses begin the new growing season disease free. Remember, it's always easier to prevent disease than it is to cure it!

If you're planning to have a new rose bed this season and haven't already done so, make every effort to get your soil ready as soon as possible. This may be difficult to accomplish now due to the wet ground. If your soil is wet, do not dig in it until it has a chance to dry out some. When preparing a new bed, be sure to add plenty of organic material, such as mushroom compost, sphagnum peat, pine bark fines, manure, etc. A good soil mix for roses will have about 1/2 good top soil, 1/4 sand (or perlite or expanded shale) and 1/4 organic material. If you are planning to remove your existing soil and replace it with a good blend, then it just has to be dry enough for you to dig out and remove.

If you ordered any bare root roses from the catalog suppliers, they will be arriving soon. Before planting, soak them overnight in water with some root stimulator added. This will help re-hydrate the dormant plants. When planting bare root roses, be sure to cover the canes with mulch to keep the wind from drying them out. If your beds aren't ready for planting, you can pot your roses up in 3 gallon nursery containers. You'll need to keep them indoors at night when the temperature is near freezing or below. When purchasing roses, we always recommend that you buy as many as possible locally so you can see what you're getting. Always buy the best quality roses you can find and avoid the discount store bargains that are covered with wax. Buying good plants greatly increases the odds of success! When selecting which varieties to purchase, be sure to check out the Recommended Roses page on this web site. These roses have

been grown locally and demonstrated that they will perform well in our area.

When buying from local suppliers, many rosarians like to make their purchases in February while the selections are good. While this is a good idea, it is not recommended that you plant them until we get warmer weather later in the spring. You can keep them in the pot in a nice sunny location. Make sure they are well watered and when the temperature is going to be in the mid-thirties or below, move them to your garage until the cold is past.

Next month we will take a more in depth look at how to prune your roses.