

January

January is the time when many of us start dreaming about spring. However, before we get to spring, we have to get through winter. While there are not a lot of chores to be done in the rose garden, there are a few things that should be addressed.

If you have not already done so, cut all of your tall roses back to about 4 feet high. This will prevent the canes from whipping in the winter wind. Do not confuse this cut back with the spring pruning which we will do in March. However, do not cut back your climbers and any of the once blooming roses that you might have in your garden. Cutting them back will adversely impact your spring bloom for these roses.

If possible, you should pick a nice day with no rain in the forecast when the temperature is above freezing and apply a lime sulfur dormant spray. This product is getting rather hard to come by, but check with your favorite lawn and garden store. We plan to offer this product again this year through our annual rose society products sale later this spring. It is also a good idea to apply liquid lime sulfur immediately after you spring prune your roses in March. Apply the spray liberally to your plants and the surrounding area. 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. Application of this spray is especially important if you had blackspot in your garden during this past fall.

So far, early winter has been a mixed bag of hot and cold temperatures. Hopefully the rest of the winter will not be too harsh, but only Mother Nature knows for sure and she ain't talking! If past experience is any indication, we will have a mixture of nice days and not so nice days. In other words, our winters tend to be all over the place weather wise.

To help their roses deal with these sudden temperature drops, some rosarians like to provide a thick layer of mulch around and over the bud union. We generally just do this to all the new roses in our garden that were planted this past season, especially if they are on fortuniana rootstock. We recommend materials such as mushroom compost, pine bark, pine needles, oak leaves (shredded if possible), or loose top soil that is brought in from another part of the garden. This extra mulch is intended to help keep the soil at a more constant temperature. To help hold the mulch in place, we use ¼" plastic hardware cloth and make a ring around the bush. We then fill the ring in with our mulch material. Our preference is to use pine needles. It is also a good idea to place some of this winter protection around plants which tend to be more susceptible to winter damage. If you have a small garden, perhaps you will want to consider mulching all of your roses. Better safe than sorry!

Finally, make sure your rose beds are as clean as possible. This includes removing any of those pesky winter weeds which seem to always come at this time of year. You should also take time to clean up any dead leaves from your roses that have fallen on the ground. Many rosarians remove all of the leaves from their roses, however we do not do this. We feel the existing leaves will provide some protection and will come off when we prune in March. Speaking of pruning, sometimes when we get a few warm days, either this month or February, some rosarians are tempted to start pruning their roses. Pruning this early will encourage new growth that will surely be killed by any cold weather that may yet come. We encourage folks to wait until March to prune.

Another approach to providing winter protection is to spray a coating of an anti-transpirant, such as Wilt-Pruf, Wilt Stop, or Anti-Stress 2000. These products provide a thin coating which reduces moisture loss and helps prevent winter kill. They are particularly helpful when we experience extreme cold temperatures in the low teens combined with wind. However, to be effective, they must be applied a few days before you expect the severe cold weather and they generally only last for about a month.

During those cold winter days of January, many of us start to browse the various rose catalogs and websites of the different suppliers. Most of the time, the pictures always seem to look better than the actual roses. When selecting new roses to add to your garden, we recommend that you check with some of our local consulting rosarians to make sure the variety will do well in our area. You can find a list of local consulting rosarians elsewhere on this web site. In addition, you might consider checking out the Recommended Roses page available on this web site. There is also an article in our society newsletter on some of the newer rose varieties on the market. If possible, try and come to our January meeting at the Trinity Lutheran church in Hixson. You will meet some really friendly rosarians that will be glad to answer any questions you might have. Whenever possible, we strongly recommend that you purchase your new roses locally which will allow you to see the plant before you buy it.

In closing, we want to again extend a special invitation for you to attend our January 18th meeting at Trinity Lutheran church in Hixson near Northgate Mall. We have a great group of folks who enjoy meeting and sharing their knowledge of growing this wonderful flower, the rose. Visitors are always welcome! Perhaps you are considering joining our club. Some of the benefits of membership in our club include access to our quarterly newsletter. Hope to see you at one of our meetings soon!