

This spring has certainly had its' share of challenges. We have had lots of wind, cold temperatures, and of course rain. We were beginning to wonder if it would ever warm up. Well, May looks like we are finally going to see some nicer weather. Hopefully it will not get too hot too quick.

Typically, May is an exciting time in the rose garden as we anticipate our first big bloom cycle of the season. When we performed our spring pruning in March, we did not see much winter damage, so we are hoping for a great bloom in early May.

As our roses continue to develop, it is important that we keep looking throughout the garden for dead and/or damaged canes. They should be promptly removed. It is also important that we keep our plants well-watered. So far, Mother Nature has provided plenty of moisture, however that can quickly change. Be aware that windy days can dry out your plants quicker than you might think, so keep an eye on that. The roses need at least an inch per week. Remember, water is the key ingredient that makes everything you do to your plants work.

If you have not already done so, it is a good idea to get a soil sample done to determine what type of nutrients your roses might need. Now is a good time to apply some organic fertilizer, as the soil should finally be warm so that the microorganisms can do their thing. It has taken a lot of energy for our roses to produce that first bloom cycle and they will need a boost to keep the going. As that first bloom cycle begins to fade, it is a good idea to give your plants a boost with some synthetic fertilizer according to what your soil sample indicates. You probably will only need to apply a fertilizer that is fairly high in nitrogen. You can accomplish this with a lawn fertilizer that has lots of nitrogen with little or no other elements. A word of caution, **DO NOT USE A LAWN FERTILIER LABELED AS A WEED AND FEED PRODUCT**. Make sure your soil is moist, and sprinkle roughly a ¼ cup of fertilizer evenly around each plant. Lightly scratch the fertilizer into the soil and then water well. If you simply apply fertilizer and don't water, you are likely to suffer some plant damage due to nitrogen burn. Water is the key to getting the fertilizer to the root system where the plant can intake it and use it to grow strong and produce beautiful blooms. For an extra boost, about mid-month you can apply your favorite liquid fertilizer.

If you have roses that are not disease resistant, you will need to have a spray program focusing on preventing disease, particularly blackspot. This is especially true this year due to the cold wet spring we have endured. Remember, disease is always easier to prevent than cure! There are plenty of products on the market for you to consider using. We recommend that you look for the Spray Formulations charts found elsewhere on this site. Theses chart also contain information about "Mode of Activity." To get the best results, we recommend alternating at least two products with a different "Mode of Activity" on a weekly basis. We suggest you print a copy of the chart for small gardens and take it with you when you go shopping for pesticides. Remember to always read the label on any pesticide you choose to use.

For insects, we recommend the integrated pest management approach, which basically says you don't spray for insects until they are likely to be present. When considering using any insecticides, make sure you properly identify the enemy. Don't kill everything in the garden

when you only have aphids! Early in the month your focus should be on aphids. They are the small green insects that cluster around your newly forming buds. If possible, blast them off your buds with a sharp spray of water. Otherwise, you can use almost any good garden insecticide to take care of them. Later in the month, thrips can attack your blooms as they are just opening. They are so small that you can barely see them. They suck juices from the blooms thus leaving a brown, unsightly edge. They are more difficult to control. The best approach is to begin treating for them as soon as you begin seeing buds forming in your garden and continue through the first bloom cycle. We recommend that you shop for an insecticide that has Spinosad as the active ingredient. There are several on the market and available locally.

As the weather heats up, we are likely to start having spider mites visit our roses. They attack the undersides of your foliage and as a result the leaves will turn lighter in color. The best approach for spider mites is to wash the undersides of your roses with a sharp spray of water. Do this as early as the conditions are right for mites and you should be able to control them pretty easily.

May is also when we celebrate Mother's Day. Why not consider purchasing a new rose bush for that special person on your list. After all, a bush will provide blooms that can be enjoyed all summer long and even well into the fall. Many local nurseries still have a nice selection available, so check it out.

If you have any questions, please visit the Ask the Experts tab and send us your question. We'll respond in a timely fashion. Remember, the only dumb question is the one not asked.