

OCTOBER IN THE ROSE GARDEN

September presented us with some typically hot humid weather and absolutely no rain. Ouch! That was tough on roses and rosarians. Hopefully, you have kept your roses watered and sprayed for fungus, in particular, black spot. If so, you are in for a real treat as the cooler fall weather will help your roses have bigger blooms with more intense and rich color.

The general tendency is for the rosarian to hibernate long before the roses have finished blooming for the season. We encourage you to resist this temptation, as there is plenty of rose season left. In fact, if you continue to perform a few maintenance tasks, your roses will continue to give you beautiful flowers until we have a couple of hard freezes, which could be as late as Thanksgiving or even Christmas.

First and foremost, you need to continue your spray program, focusing on disease prevention. The cooler nights of fall offer perfect conditions for blackspot to develop. It is also possible for us to experience some powdery mildew in the fall. Roses that enter the winter with no disease problems are more likely to emerge next spring in good condition. Therefore, it is really important that we remain focused on eradicating and preventing disease in the rose garden. To find products that that you can use to help prevent these diseases, go to the Spray Formulations charts found elsewhere on the web site. These charts have a vast array of products that you can find locally to use. If you already have blackspot in your garden, try using Manzate, Mancozeb, or Daconil every three days for two weeks. If you have tried these without good success, you might consider spraying with liquid lime sulfur at the recommended dosage for the growing season. Do not mix other pesticides with Daconil, as it will burn the foliage on your bushes.

When the weather is hot and dry, like it has been lately, spider mites can invade our garden. If you see foliage that looks dry and yellow, check the undersides of the leaves. Spider mites appear as small specs of salt. You might also find some webbing. If you do, sure enough, you have spider mites. The best way to keep spider mites under control is to spray the undersides of your rose foliage with a sharp and relatively forceful spray of water. Do this in the heat of day and it will not only eliminate the mites, it will also cool down your roses as well as you! If you have a lot of spider mites, use water every three days for three cycles and that should do the trick.

Looking at the long range forecast, it appears that we may continue to experience a rather dry fall. If in fact it doesn't rain, a good rule of thumb is to provide an inch of water per week. If you water your roses from overhead, be sure to do it early enough in the day to allow your foliage to dry before nightfall. This will help minimize the possibility of an invasion of blackspot.

If some of your roses are not performing up to par, it is a good idea to check the pH. Roses like soil that has a pH in the 6.0 to 6.5 range, which is a little on the acidic side.

If the pH is not in this range, your roses cannot take in the fertilizers you are giving them. That is why having the correct pH is vital to having a good rose garden. Even if you think your roses are all doing pretty well, fall is a good time to check your soil pH. You can then make adjustments as necessary.

You should no longer apply any granular fertilizer to your roses, however it is still OK to use liquid fertilizers that primarily promote blooms. These are easily identified by the large middle number in the formulation (i.e., 10-60-10). We would further recommend that you stop all fertilization by the end of October.

During the month, continue to remove spent blooms and as many leaves infected with blackspot as possible. Also remove any fallen leaves which can host insects and disease. Do your best to keep the weeds out before they have a chance to get a foothold. Maintaining a neat and clean garden will go a long way in helping prevent diseases and insects. Some rosarians get their rose beds free of weeds and then apply a pre-emergent product such as Preen. These products form a "weed barrier" on the soil surface to help keep new weed seeds from germinating. Weed free rose beds are certainly nice when you start your spring pruning.

Now is a good time to review your garden and determine if there are plants that you want to replace next spring. In fact, it is a good idea to go ahead and dig them up. You can then add organics to the soil and have it ready to plant next spring.

Finally, if you are planning to add a new rose bed for next year, now is the best time to get it ready. Soil should be prepared to a depth of at least 20 inches. When preparing your soil, a good rule of thumb is to have about 1/2 top soil, 1/4 organic and 1/4 expanded clay, sand or bark fines. There is nothing more important to having good roses than to have a good home for them to grow in. It all starts with good soil!

Remember, fall can be a great time in the rose garden. Get out there and enjoy some of the best blooms of the season!