

Clipping advice to punch up hybrid tea roses



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February is pruning time for hybrid tea roses. Many bushes will suffer from neglect; others, from abuse. The shears and loppers are either left in the shed, or they are wielded with unnecessary zeal.

There are several reasons for pruning roses during the dormant season: to remove old, dead or diseased growth, to train the plant to the desired shape and height, and to

influence the size and quantity of subsequent blossoms. All of these purposes are particularly important for hybrid tea roses.

Get ready

Before you make a cut, check out the following advice.

- **Timing:** Ideally, prune two or three weeks before new growth begins in early spring.

Done too early, pruning will stimulate new growth that is easily damaged by a late frost or freeze. If pruning is too late, after the bush is actively growing, the plant's energy is wasted and flowering is delayed.

- **Planning:** Before making the first cut, decide on a shape and height for the plant, and whether you want a few large, long-stemmed, show-type blossoms or an abundance of shorter stemmed, medium-size flowers.

Heavy pruning, leaving only three or four canes and cutting them back to 8 to 12 inches, will stimulate long stems and fewer, but larger blossoms. Moderate pruning, leaving five or more canes 18 to 24 inches tall, will result in a larger, bushier plant and many more — although somewhat smaller — blossoms.

- **Tools and tips:** Use bypass (scissor type) pruning shears and long-handled loppers, and be sure the blades are sharp. Sharp cutting tools make the job easier for you and less damaging to the plants.

When making the cuts, have the cutting blade on the lower side to avoid bruising the stems.

Unless completely removing a cane, make all cuts 1/4 inch above a bud or eye and at a 45-degree angle, with the lower edge of the cut on the opposite side of the stem from the bud.

Making the cuts

Prune according to the method described as follows.

- Remove dead wood down to a healthy bud or eye. The cut should be at least 1 inch below the dead area.

- Remove old, woody canes. They will produce twiggy growth, not strong stems and flowers.

- Remove any suckers that are coming up from below the crown.

- Remove canes that are growing toward the center of the plant, and any that are growing out laterally instead of upward.

- If two stems are crossing or rubbing, remove the weaker stem.

- Prune out any weak or twiggy growth.

- Cut back the remaining canes to the desired height.

When making these cuts, check the pithy centers of the canes for signs of canker. The pith should be white, not tan or brown. If it is discolored, keep cutting back until you are at least 1 inch below the discolored area and just above a healthy bud or eye.

- In most cases, each cut should be just above an outward-facing bud or eye. The new growth will be in the direction the bud is pointing. Occasionally, however if an individual plant has a spreading growth habit, you may want to encourage more erect growth by pruning just above buds that face inward.

- Because disease pathogens can winter-over in plant debris, be sure to pick up and dispose of all pruned canes and leaves.



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