



UNIVERSITY *of* CALIFORNIA

Agriculture & Natural Resources

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ROSE PRUNING FACTS

- WHY PRUNE:** Pruning assists in the natural growth cycle by replacing old weak growth with vigorous new growth. It permits good air circulation and induces the plant to concentrate energy into the growth of the remaining healthy shoots.
- EQUIPMENT:** Protective gloves, sharp pruners, pruning saw, loppers
- PRUNING TECHNIQUE:** Remove dead, diseased or damaged wood, cutting back into healthy white pith; remove any crossing shoots and weak spindly growth. Make a clean cut just above a healthy outward facing bud, angled away from the direction that you want the new shoot to develop.
- WHEN TO PRUNE:** Prune when the plant is dormant or semi-dormant between bud-break. In years when temperatures seldom fall below freezing, roses bloom continuously. Therefore, prune to induce dormancy and an artificial period of rest. Nearly all newly planted roses should be pruned back hard within 3-6 inches above ground level to encourage development of a well balanced framework of sturdy, healthy shoots and a strong root system.

PRUNING TECHNIQUES FOR SPECIFIC TYPES OF ROSES

(Please see Rose Glossary for description of rose varieties)

Hybrid Teas: Most hybrid teas are naturally upright, resulting in overcrowded stems in the center of the bush. The outer stems need to be shortened to healthy outward-pointing buds and central stems need to be removed to open the center of the bush. Choose 3-5 stocky young canes as scaffolding for the next season's flowering shoots. Shorten these to 10-12 inches. Remove dead, diseased, damaged and weak growth. Cut away shoots less than a pencil in thickness. Remove thick unproductive and unwanted canes as close to the bud union as possible.

Floribundas: Floribundas are cluster-flowered roses. They are pruned the same as hybrid teas, except that the stems are left longer, allowing for development of more flowering shoots. Because the cluster-flowers are carried on long stems, there may not be outward-facing buds to cut the stems to. Therefore, cut the stem to the desired height, which should stimulate a dormant bud.

Patio and polyanthas: Prune the same as for Floribundas, since these are small cultivars of the cluster-flowered type. Remove unproductive wood and reduce the main stem by 2/3 to a healthy bud or lateral.



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Miniature Roses: Prune the same as for Floribundas. If the bushes are growing well, shorten canes by 2/3 and remove twiggy growth from the center. If growing poorly, remove only dead, diseased and damaged growth and any crossing stems. Reduce sideshoots to relieve congestion.

Standard Roses: Specific pruning requirements depend on which type of rose forms the head. Prune repeat-flowering roses in the dormant season; for one-time blooming flowers, prune after flowering. Also see following instructions for bush and weeping standards.

Bush standard: Prune on planting and when established according to the type of rose that forms the head, whether a hybrid tea, floribunda, patio or miniature rose, or a groundcover rose. Treat the graft point of the standard as if it were at ground level when shortening stems. Maintain a balanced head by pruning harder on the weaker side of the plant. Groundcover standards require the least amount of pruning, and benefit from thinning twiggy growth.

Weeping standard: Do not prune for the first couple of years to encourage development of the desired form. Prune only to remove dead, damaged or diseased growth, or to shorten weak, spindly shoots to a strong bud. Once established, prune according to rose type. For ramblers, cut back to new basal shoots. For less vigorous roses, remove only one in two or three flowered stems every other year. Cut shoots or buds facing upward and outward to produce a cascading effect. With climbers, prune to buds facing outward and downward to improve the shape of the plant.

Shrub Roses: Pruning depends on the individual cultivar's growth and flowering habit. Shrub roses flower on older wood. Maintain with light annual pruning to achieve a healthy balance of older wood and young vigorous growth.

Species Roses: These roses require little pruning in the dormant season to remove dead, damaged or weak shoots. Roses that are performing poorly or that have unhealthy, tangled old growth can be rejuvenated by harder pruning (See Renovation Pruning below).

Old Garden Roses: Prune *Albas, Damasks, Mosses and Provinces* as soon as their single flush of summer flowering is over. Lightly tip-prune long shoots on planting; cut back main stems and laterals by 1/3. In the autumn, extra-long shoots can be shortened so as not to be blown about in high winds. Older plants can be thinned by cutting all but the most vigorous young stems, which should be cut back by 1/3. Prune *Bourbon, China, and Portland* roses the same as albas but in the dormant season, since they are repeat-flowering. For *Gallicas*, tip-prune lightly any overlong stems and cut out one or two stems if growth is crowded. Remove all dead, diseased and damaged stems in spring. In early summer, when flowering has finished, thin growth by cutting back laterals to a main stem or to a shoot close to a main stem. Every 1-3 years, depending on the vigor of growth, take out one or two old main stems at or near ground level. In winter, use shears to lightly clip over gallicas grown as hedges. Old and neglected gallicas will often respond well if pruned drastically in early spring, with all but the most vigorous young stems being cut out completely.

Modern Shrub Roses: Prune during the dormant season. *Modern floribunda shrub roses* can be pruned as for floribunda roses, by shortening main stems by 1/3, and cutting back lateral stems by 2/3. *Hybrid Musks* are pruned during the dormant season by removing dead, diseased and damaged wood and removing 1-3 of the oldest, least productive stems. Cut back main stems by up to 1/3 and laterals by 1/2. *Rugosas* are pruned in the dormant season, tip-pruning long stems and occasionally taking out an old stem completely. To renovate, thin more drastically, taking out several old stems and cutting back one in every two or three that remain by up to half.

Groundcover Roses: *Modern shrub type:* Prune those that are repeat-flowering in the dormant period, all others in the summer after flowering. Cut out any diseased stems and tip-prune main stems, or shorten them if they have extended over their intended boundary. Open the center by shortening laterals. *Creeping Rambler type:* Lightly prune in summer after flowering only to cut stems back to upright shoots to keep within bounds; to increase flower production, spread and peg down stems. Renovate as for ramblers.

Climbing Roses: *Formative pruning--*Climbers are sold with much longer shoots than bedding roses, and should not be pruned after purchase. Once growth begins, if the main stems are slow to branch, tip-prune them to the first outward facing bud on outer stems, which will encourage lateral growth. Until well established, no further pruning is necessary, except to remove dead, diseased or spindly leafless growth and any suckers. *Established pruning in autumn—*Prune flowered shoots by 2/3 of their length by making angled cuts just above a healthy shoot or bud. Cut out completely any aging, unhealthy or spindly growth. Remove dead, damaged, and diseased canes.

Ramblers: *Formative training—*Ramblers should be pruned at the time of planting to stimulate growth from the base; remove dead, damaged or weak and twiggy growth and cut main stems back to about 16 inches from the ground. *Established pruning—*Thin and shorten growth after summer flowering. Ramblers make more new growth at the base of the plant than climbers, and this should be encouraged by cutting one in three of the old flowered stems back to ground level, removing them in short sections so as not to cause damage. Shorten sideshoots by about 2/3 to encourage them to develop flowering shoots for the following season. Tip-prune the remaining leading shoots by 2-3 inches to encourage branching.

RENOVATION PRUNING

Climbers, bush roses, and ramblers generally need to be pruned more drastically than other types of perennials, which may mean that some roses will experience a season without flowers since some are typically pruned after flowering. For bush and shrub roses that require drastic pruning, first shorten overall growth, cutting dead stems and stumps back to the base of the plant. Remove suckers. Then cut remaining growth within 1-2” of the ground. This may kill a rose that might have lingered a little longer on its own, but more often it will stimulate dormant buds at the base of the plant and completely invigorate the rose. A less drastic approach, which can be spread over two years, is to extend renovation pruning over a period of two years, drastically shortening only 50% of the stems in each year.

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ROSE GLOSSARY

Roses are classified into three main groups: 1) *Modern Garden roses*, which include Hybrid Tea, Floribunda, Patio, Miniature bush, Polyantha, Groundcover and Rambler; 2) *Species roses* which include mostly large shrubs or climbers with mainly single flowers in spring or summer followed by decorative hips in autumn; and 3) *Old Garden roses* which include Albas, Bourbons, China, Damask, Gallica, Hybrid Perpetual, Noisette, Portland, and Tea

Hybrid Tea: Flower buds are tall and centered, and bloom throughout the summer.

Floribunda: These are hardy, disease resistant and free flowering modern roses that bloom in clusters rather than one to a stem.

Patio and polyanthas: These are tough, compact shrubs with clusters of blossoms. They are known for lack of fragrance and are generally trouble-free and free blooming.

Miniature roses: These are diminutive counterparts of other rose varieties.

Standard roses: These are also known as “tree roses”. Standards range from miniatures through full standard rose bushes with and overall height of 4 feet. All are formed by top grafting the desired rose onto a tall stem.

Bush standard: These are cultivars of hybrid teas, floribundas, and miniature roses top grafted onto a clear stem.

Weeping standard: These are formed by top grafting a rambler, climber, or ground cover rose onto a clear stem.

Shrub rose: These are roses with shrub like form. They generally flower on older wood.

Species rose: These are the truly wild roses

Old garden roses: These roses are characterized by blossoms that are cupped or shaped like a rosette rather than with a high, pointed center. The term “heirloom” is sometimes substituted.

Modern shrub roses: These hybrid roses were introduced after 1867. Many combine the vigor of species roses with the repeat flowering characteristic of modern roses. Most are upright, bushy and robust, reaching heights of 4-6 feet.

Groundcover roses: There are two varieties: 1) modern shrubs, which are low-growing spreading roses generally less than 2 feet tall; and 2) creeping ramblers which have long, flexible stems which hug the ground, root where they touch the ground, and may reach 10ft in length.

Climbing roses: These roses have long stiff shoots of either single or clusters of flowers that blossom repeatedly throughout the season.

Ramblers: These are climbing vigorous plants with large clusters of small flowers that bloom freely on old wood. Ramblers have very long and flexible stems.

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