

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 4-30-03) , ©2005

Roses are on most gardeners “must have” lists. You can grow roses by following these six rules of rose growing adapted from retired WSU Master Gardener Frances Husby of Seabeck. Frances has been bed ridden for the past year or more but all of us who ever visited her garden went home wishing we could emulate her talents. We miss following her through her garden telling us about her newest plants and giving us tips on how to have great gardening success. Today’s column is in honor of Frances.

Rule one is give roses sun, sun and more sun. No less than six hours every day or even more sun if possible. The more sun the roses receive the more blooms you’ll get at bloom time. That’s a tall order here in Puget Sound but we are ever optimistic and many roses grow great here. Make sure to plant your roses in the sunniest possible part of your garden for maximum success.

Rule two is plant in well-drained, deeply cultivated soil. Husby says work the planting area very well and deeply. Roses aren’t too fussy about the pH of the soil but prefer neutral which is about 6.5 pH. Add organic matter to the soil to give a nice loose texture. Don’t add fertilizer in the planting area with new roses because you’ll want the roots to become established before encouraging new lush growth. Do not feed roses in their first year in your garden.

Rule three, four and five are ventilation, proper watering and mulching, followed by good garden-keeping habits. To assure good ventilation space roses far enough apart for excellent air movement which is essential to control fungal diseases and pests. Roses require at least one inch of water each week to flourish. Soaker hoses are the best method and help prevent fungal diseases. Mulching is done in late fall and winter. Remove all mulches in mid spring and throughout the year clean up any fallen leaves. Also remove damaged branches and old blooms as soon as possible.

The final rule is pruning. Hybrid Tea Roses should be pruned back in late February or early March to about one-third of their height. At the same time remove all damaged or dead stems and eliminate very thin and spindly looking growth. You might also want to remove some of the center stems for better circulation. These Hybrid Tea Roses are the roses people grow for show and the pruning encourages blooms. Other roses require less care than Hybrid Teas.

To prune shrub roses, floribundas and repeat flowering heirloom roses lightly prune while dormant, shaping and removing too leggy or unsightly growth. These roses are to be treated more like a shrub and you’ll prune only a third or less of the growth per year. You’re only pruning to encourage the shape of the plant, not to encourage blooms. These plants bloom well on their own.

Some rose varieties only bloom once a year. These are sometimes called “once-blooming” roses. You will prune or shape these roses after they bloom. The flowers are

produced on the next year's growth on shoots produced in summer after blooming, Frances says. She also notes that you'll still want to remove any diseased or dead branches and prune back if the plant has become too large for the space.

Lastly are climbers and ramblers and you'll need to know whether your rambler blooms on the new wood or on old wood. As a whole ramblers need very little pruning. When blooms start becoming smaller you'll remove a few branches at the very base of the plant. "Just be careful, it takes a long time to grow those lovely, long branches. It is best to err on the side of under-pruning than over-pruning," says Husby.

If you want to learn more about growing roses visit a Rose Society meeting in Kitsap County. For more details on the group call Master Gardener and Rosarian Eric Hunter at 360-337-9917. Visit our Kitsap Regional Library and check out some books on roses by authors D. G. Hessayon, Roger Phillips and Martyn Rix, Thomas Graham or Rhonda Hart. One of my favorite books on roses with more than 600 full color photos is "Classic Roses" by Peter Beales.

For can't fail roses you might want to plant some "flower carpet" roses. Flower carpets come in shades of red, white, pink and apricot. They'll actually grow in partial shade and are very resistant to disease. You can prune them profusely to keep them low growing or let them grow into four-foot shrubs. Rugosa roses are quite hardy and iron-clad too. Heirloom roses will also provide great success.