

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Life is a Bed of Roses

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Grades

The American Nurseryman Association sets the grades on roses as 1, 1 ½, and 2. The highest quality for the biggest and best canes that will bloom the first year is #1. Although the other grades cost less, they may take two or more years to bloom. A patented rose is registered by the breeder and simply means that no one else may duplicate or propagate it without permission, including taking cuttings.

After choosing the sunny location for optimal growth, these are the simple planting instructions:

- Soak roots in a bucket of water for a minimum of one hour when planting bare root. Thoroughly water a container rose for two days before planting.
- Prepare the soil by tilling compost and other organic matter. Roses thrive in acidic soil. Adding your coffee grinds will enhance the growing. Gypsum and

soil sulfur reduce the alkalinity.

- Dig the hole twice the size of the root ball and plant to the same depth.
- Plant roses three feet apart and away from other large bushes to allow for air circulation. Air movement discourages disease.
- Make sure the graft (the raised bump on the stem) is planted at least two inches above the dirt here in our warmer climates of Lamorinda. If you are planting another garden in a colder region, the graft goes two inches below the ground.
- Layer three inches of rich mulch at the base of the plant. It keeps down weeds, provides nutrients, and can be added any time during the growing season. Good mulches include wood chips, shavings, shredded bark, pine needles, cottonseed, chipped oak leaves, and peat nuggets.

- Water adequately from the bottom. Roses do not like to be sprayed. Keep moist, but not soaked.

My secret to healthy roses is that when planting, then again every March, I dig two or three cupfuls of alfalfa pellets into the dirt around the roses. Roses are heavy feeders. Start fertilizing with an organic rose fertilizer after a month. The more organic matter you use, including coffee grinds, the less supplemental fertilizer you'll need.

Companions

Many people like to combine other specimens with roses. The best companion plants are those with similar needs of sunshine, acidic soil, and water. Alyssum and lobelia are great choices as bottom breeders while lavender and sages offer pest resistance and attract bees and hummingbirds, adding beauty and perfume with their blue and purple flowers.

Care

Buy top quality roses for the best pest prevention precaution. If planted, watered, and fed properly, roses are healthy and prolific. If you have a specific problem, contact your local nursery or garden center for organic control options.

Deadhead regularly through the blooming season, cutting below the fifth leaf. Keep your pruning shears clean by wiping with alcohol between bushes. Always wear gloves to protect you from the thorns. Pruning promotes vigorous blooming and bigger plants. For the modern varieties, pruning keeps the roses blooming all season. Old-fashioned roses and climbers that bloom once annually need to be pruned immediately after flowering as next year's flowers bloom on this year's wood. For heavy winter pruning, mid to late January is the ideal time to prune roses in Lamorinda. To keep your roses blooming, don't allow the rose hips to form, which are the small reddish fruits that tell the plant it is "going to seed" and done blooming.

This is a short crash course in creating your own bed of roses. May you see life through rose-colored glasses and stop to smell your roses. Once you enjoy the ravishing beauty, flamboyant colors, delectable fragrance, and simple maintenance of the queen flowers, you may join the mantra of Emma Goldman and myself, "I'd rather have roses on my tables than diamonds around my neck!"



Cynthia's favorite miniature rose, *Sunshine Sprinkles*, with multiple yellow/tangerine blossoms on 12 inch stems.