

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for February

Roses are red

By Cynthia Brian

"That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet." – William Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliet"



Mr. Lincoln, the perfect red rose.

Roses are red and pink, salmon, yellow, orange, purple, white, mauve, and are available in a plethora of color combinations and variety choices. Under the thumb of a knowledgeable gardener, roses are one of the easiest plants to grow providing 10 to 11 months of beautiful blossoms. Because of our warmer California weather, my roses are still

blooming profusely even though I am in the process of performing my annual winter pruning. (Of course I am gathering the flowers to use in my indoor arrangements and potpourri). Many gardeners shy away from roses assuming they are just to "fussy" and demanding to be sustainable, yet, in my experience, I have always found roses to be the bedrock of my multi-purpose

Photos Cynthia Brian

gardens.

February is the perfect month to plant bare root roses. Whether you are planning to purchase bare root or containerized roses, follow these simple instructions for success.

1. Always buy healthy specimens. Choose your plants carefully. A damaged, diseased or dried rose will not recover and may cause problems for your other specimens.
2. Choose a sunny site where your rose will get at least six hours of sunshine daily.
3. Enrich the soil with a rich humus organic matter that will allow for good drainage. Roses like acidic soil with a 6.5 pH.
4. For container roses, soak the roses for at least half an hour and allow all the water to drain. Bare root roses need their root systems soaked overnight. Do not allow roots to dry out.
5. Space at least two feet apart to allow for air circulation.
6. After digging your hole, add compost or rotted material, permitting the bud union to be two to three inches below ground.
7. Add three inches of coarse mulch around the roses. The mulch keeps splashing water from spreading fungal disease on the foliage. Blackspot spores may germinate whenever leaves are wet. Fungus must be killed with a fungicide before it enters the leaf tissue. Dust or spray before a rain.
8. Water deeply directly to the soil and keep the soil moist but not soggy. Overhead sprinklers are not recommended.
9. Fertilize in the spring. I add a cup of alfalfa pellets to each plant, which I buy at the feed store, combined with diatomaceous earth. Work it well into the soil. Alfalfa supplies nitrogen, calcium, phosphorus, and plenty of other nutrients. Throughout the year, I swirl my used coffee grounds in a quart of water and throw them on the plants. Plus, whenever I eat a banana, the peel flies into the rose garden. The potassium and phosphorus aid in blooming.

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