

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for February

Love is a rose

"Everything is coming up roses!" – Ethel Merman



A beautiful bush of old roses.

Photos Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian

When Cupid shoots his arrow of amour on Feb. 14, more than 51 percent of the flowers bestowed upon the lovers will be roses. The allure of roses dates back more than 5,000 years when rose cultivation began in China. Evidence in fossils indicates that the wild rose

is as ancient as 35 million years. No wonder the rose has symbolized beauty, love, politics and war for the past five centuries in our modern world.

Roses possess a classic beauty with an unrivaled diversity of shapes, sizes, colors and fragrances. Blooms may be solitary and delicate, semi-double, open cupped, rosette, pompon, peony-like, buttoned and ruffled.

They may be single stemmed or present a bouquet of several blossoms on a stalk. Newer disease-resistant varieties brag continuous flowering from the first bud in spring to the final pruning in winter.

Best of all, with a little know-how, roses are one of the easiest plants to grow in our gardens, offering perennial joy. Plant them in a formal garden bordered by boxwoods, or add varying heights of roses to a casual mixed backyard bed. Pop them in containers to add elegance to a porch, patio, or balcony. Train climbers and ramblers to grow on arches, gates, trellises, fences and walls, adding vertical appeal.

In our hardiness zone, February is an excellent month to plant bare root roses.

How to plant bare root roses

1. Decide where you want to plant roses. Although some varieties will tolerate a reasonable amount of shade, most roses require at least four hours of daily sunshine.
2. Once you know the "where," you can decide the "which." Peruse rose catalogs and visit your nursery. You want to purchase the right rose for the right purpose. Make sure that the bare-root roses you select are healthy and sturdy. If planting more than one, it is best to purchase the same color and type of rose in uneven numbers. For example, buy three or five of the same rose for preferable impact.
3. Soak your roses overnight in a bucket of water to rehydrate them.
4. Dig a hole large enough to allow the roots to spread.
5. Spade the soil well and add compost.
6. After removing each rose from the bucket, place the bare roots of each rose in a separate hole. The bottom of the stems needs to be two to three inches below the top of the hole.
7. Replace the soil and tap around the rose with your foot until the ground is firm.
8. Water slowly and deeply.
9. Mulch with bark, shredded wood, or pine needles to three inches of thickness. This prevents erosion, controls temperature variations, suppresses weeds, and makes for a prettier presentation.