

Lamorinda

OUR HOMES

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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Time to prune roses



The lavender-hued Angel Face rose.

Photos Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian

"I love to prune my roses. That's the one thing I really feel I do pretty well!"
~ Julie Andrews

My roses are still blooming, and the bushes are filled with leaves. Yet, it is February and time to do the heavy pruning. My grapevines are already pruned, but I've been waiting for my roses to remember it is winter before I cut them back. Towards the middle to end of January used to be the optimum weeks to prune roses. Last year, I didn't prune until late February and this year will be the same. Pruning any later in the season will deplete the plant's energy resulting in spindly shoots. Normally within two months of pruning, the roses are once again touting their fragrant flowers. I gave over 100 canes of my various roses to my neighbor last season. She rooted three or four canes per container of potting soil and by May those canes were blooming.

Ah, roses. They are one of nature's super spectacular specimens. Fossil evidence in Oregon and Montana indicates that the rose dates back at least 35 million years, long before humans appeared on the landscape. Cultivation probably began in China more than 5,000 years ago. In the 17th century, roses and rose water were used as payment for goods and

barter. Late in the 18th century, China introduced cultivated roses to Europe. Throughout history, roses have been used for perfume, medicine, symbolism, and legal tender.

For many years, I've had the privilege of chatting with various expert rosarians across the globe. The one piece of advice that is common to all is the recommendation to lose the fear of pruning. Although there are guidelines for proper pruning, if you make a mistake, or don't follow the directions, most likely the rose bush will survive despite your best efforts to give it a bad cut.

The reasons for pruning are numerous. Pruning does the following:

1. Creates a plant that will flower with high-quality blooms.
2. Shapes the bush into an attraction that fits with the garden.
3. Removes deadwood and diseased stems.
4. Removes canes that are weak or rubbing against one another.
5. Stimulates new growth.

Pruning is cathartic and good for the soul of humans! It is a garden chore that I always encourage a homeowner to do herself as opposed to hiring someone to do this chore.

Tools of the trade include heavy-duty garden gloves, a sharp-edged pruning shear, and long-handled loppers for those thick canes. Sterilize your tools before you begin the task, then get up close and personal.

How to Prune:

Most roses are not fussy when it comes to how they are pruned. Repeat flowering shrub and bush roses are the most forgiving. English roses, hybrid teas, floribundas, patio, and miniatures can be pruned similarly. Reduce their height by 1/3 to 2/3 depending on how you want your plant to look and how tall you want the plant to grow. Thin stems to aid in disease control.

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A rose blooms from a cane planted in potting soil.