



ROSES BY THE MONTH

February

Excepting May when its high rose tide, February for me is the most exciting month in the rose garden. The roses are as dormant as they will ever get. Dormancy means rest—for the rose—not the rose gardener.

The climbers on the west side of the yard just could not support the fence (that's right) during the January 1 storm. It blew hard and down went the entire side fence. My neighbor's handy man picked up the busted up boards which, of course, fell into pieces in his yard. He's a good guy, Mike is, and has been slowly carting them away. They were really rotten and my climbers were really the principal support. Mike proudly said he had helped me prune. Three of the climbers were reduced to six inch canes from the bud union. I'm not furious. Short roses will make the fence installers job SO much easier. And it won't take too long for the Lavender Lassie, Ragged Robin, and Golden Showers to reemerge. The really good news is my insurance has covered the damage!

FINAL CHANCE FOR PRUNING

Remember, snipping back something is better than just letting the rose be. Your one-time blooming roses excluded, all your hybrid teas, floribundas, grandifloras, miniatures, climbers, and tree roses benefit from a good pruning. At the barest minimum, get rid of your deadwood and spindly growth. Cleaning up as many of the leaves, fallen hips, and snipped canes is good, healthy gardening will reduce the number of black spot, rust, and mildew spores near your plants.

One advantage of waiting until the bud eyes have begun to grow before you prune is seeing which sprouted eye the rose prefers. For some reason, a rose bush does not send an equal amount of nutrients to every bud eye. Most, in fact, stay dormant. A pecking order exists and you can take advantage of it, especially if you notice that the strongest new growth is coming from a location midway down the cane. Simply remove all growth, ½ inch above the new growth. The nutrients from the plant are already heading to this cane. The shut-off valve for the old cane will eventually close and the upper portion of the cane will die back. Prune it away now and be done with it.

I love to go back two weeks or so after pruning a