

Monterey Bay Rose Society Pruning Cheat Sheet

by Joe Truskot, Master Rosarian, January 2024



Happy New Year! It's time to prune your roses. This is my favorite time of year. I get to relive the successes I've had during the past year while planning to make my garden produce even better in 2024. Better to me means abundant flowers and well-shaped individual blossoms and sprays. Alas, now's a great time to remove under-performing bushes. New roses are best planted now, if you have any. Here's an easy summary of what you need to do this month in the garden.

Remember the following reasons why we prune.

1. Practicing good sanitation
 - a. Reduces the fungal spores circulating around the bushes
 - b. Reduces and often eliminates insect eggs and larvae
2. Forcing the bush to rest
 - a. Roses need to conserve their energy during the winter months
 - b. Eliminates substandard growth during limited daylight hours
3. Reshaping the bush
 - a. Causes the bush to grow where you want it to grow
 - b. Provides more air circulation in and around the bush allowing it to dry off during wet periods
 - c. Allows the increasing sunshine to warm the bud union

Always use the best equipment and most appropriate clothing.

1. Choose by-pass pruning shears and loppers
 - a. Oil their moving parts
 - b. They should comfortably fit your hand
2. Adjust the tool you use to the size of the job
 - a. Most useful are $\frac{3}{4}$ " to 1" blades on hand shears
 - b. Various-sized loppers will save time and energy
 - c. Use a pruning saw on old canes
 - i. they cut when you pull not when you push
 - ii. they make a clean cut, flat cut
3. Keep all your equipment VERY Sharp
 - a. Titanium sharpeners are little but really do a great job
 - b. Diamond encrusted sharpeners come in various sharpening strengths
 - c. Re-sharpen your blades after twenty or so cuts
 - d. The sharper the blade, the less energy it takes and the cleaner the cut will be
4. Wear loose, old clothing
 - a. Old rose canes at this time of year are sharp and unforgiving
 - b. Usually roses have hooked thorns
 - i. Push into a snag and jiggle yourself free
 - ii. Don't pull away from a snag

5. Wear heavy leather gloves with forearm protection
 - a. Cowhide is strongest
 - b. Deerskin or goatskin is most flexible
 - c. Watch out for prickles which stick you through a seam

Remember the following things to do while pruning.

1. Make all cuts at about a 45° angle
 - a. Angled cuts allow water droplets to roll off
 - b. Flat or horizontal cuts could let water sit on the cut and cause die-back
 - c. If the cut tears the lower part of the cane, cut it again until it's a clean slice
 - d. If you see a brown spot in the center or side of the cut, cut it again until you hit greenwood
 - e. A cane with a hollow top might contain a leaf-borer insect so keep cutting down until you hit greenwood
 - f. If cane canker or die back is apparent on the bushes being pruned, swirl your pruning blade in Lysol or bleach before you move to the next bush
 - g. Clean cuts to rose canes seal themselves in a few minutes. No need to treat them.
2. Get rid of dead wood
 - a. Do this all season long
 - b. Cut dead wood into manageable pieces to protect the live wood growing alongside it
3. Get rid of canes growing through the center of the bush
 - a. Opening up the center of the plant is the most important goal of pruning.
 - b. Remove all thin canes growing lower down
 - i. They catch falling dead leaves and petals and clog air circulation
 - ii. They never produce quality blooms – the ultimate goal
4. Get rid of misshapen, diseased, or injured canes
 - a. Remove canes which have rubbed together and scarred each other
 - b. Remove canes which broke during the year and poorly healed themselves
 - c. Remove canes which contain more than two or three instances of cane-on-cane
5. Reduce the overall size of the bush by a third to a half
 - a. This helps you move about the garden
 - b. This allows more sunlight to fall on the bud union which will produce more canes



6. Remove all leaves from the canes
 - a. Pluck the bush free of all leaves, flowers, and hips from 2023
 - i. Helps you get a better view of the bush while pruning it
 - ii. Removes any fungal spores and insect eggs.
7. Rake up all the trimmings from below the pruned bush
 - a. Many insect eggs and larvae are residing in the mulch

- i. Especially important if you have had infestations of rose curculio, cucumber beetle, whitefly, and thrips
 - ii. Fresh mulch will warm the ground in winter and allow microbes to break down organic material
 - b. Throw all trimmings from roses in the trash
 - i. Most home compost piles aren't hot enough to kill fungal spores
 - ii. Best to get the scraps out of your garden entirely
8. Spray your pruned garden with winter dormant oil
- a. Only necessary if you have had severe insect infestations
 - b. Usually will increase protection but isn't necessary
9. No need to feed your roses until new growth appears in February
- a. It counters the effort to get the bush to rest
 - b. Low sunlight levels will cause weak growth
 - c. Wet weather will rinse away the soluble forms of nitrogen and potassium

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