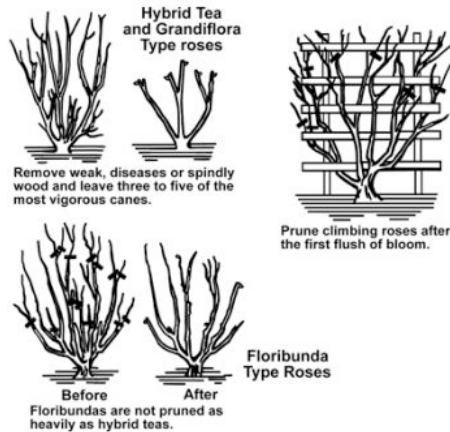


Winter Cultural Notes

By Jim Cunningham

Pruning of your roses should commence after the incidence of frost has passed in your region. This is usually late July in the Sydney area.

Pruning should be a pleasant and enjoyable day in the garden. Relax and take your time. Pruning is not difficult when common sense prevails; out with the old, in stay the new.



You are anticipating nature when you remove very old, dead, spindly wood. Any branch starting to yellow, or lacking vigour should also be removed at their point of origin. In other words remove all the rubbish and everything else that has passed its use by date.

The canes you are retaining should consist of strong healthy wood and lots of eyes for future high quality blooms. Keep as many strong canes as possible. Canes retained on large flowered roses can be reduced by half, cluster flowered roses a little lighter.

Uniform height is not a consideration; each cane should be cut according to its vigour. Cuts should be made about 5mm above an eye, and at a 45° angle away from the eye.

These basic steps apply to most roses grown, including miniatures. Remember to check all ties on tree roses and climbers. Remove and replace if needed. Keep your rose beds clean of any rubbish and diseased foliage that may have accumulated during the growing periods. Rose hygiene is a very effective way of reducing the incidence of pests and diseases in the garden.

It is now time to thoroughly spray all pruned bushes and rose beds with “fresh” Lime Sulphur. This very effective clean up spray will reduce fungal spores over winter and deter nuisance insects harbouring in your rose beds. Lime Sulphur is not compatible with other chemicals; manufacturing instructions should be adhered to.

Now is the best time to move established roses to their new home. They should be cut back and treated as if they were new plants, even if you only move them a short distance. The shock to the plant is being dug up and planted back not in the distance involved.

If you have a rose bush in your garden, a long-time favourite, given you numerous blooms over many years and it's getting old and you are very hesitant to shovel prune, try some shock treatment. The bud union is the size of a dinner plate and looks dead; however there still may be life in it. Brush a gloved hand across the union, remove any stubs cleanly with a pruning saw. Now get a “Suede” brush and vigorously brush the entire union. Give a good watering with a seaweed solution. Complete the CPR by parking your spade alongside the bush and fingers crossed.

Dormant bare root plants should be well hydrated before planting. If planting is delayed or soil conditions are not right for planting they should be heeled in.

That means they should be laid in a shallow trench with root and bud union covered with moist soil until the time is right. The planting hole should be dug to accommodate the roots comfortably. Damaged or very long roots should be removed or reduced before planting using clean, sharp secateurs. Plant the rose to a depth where the bud union is slightly above soil level. The bush will eventually settle to the correct level.

Due to the scarcity of land fill sites for waste disposal in Sydney, many Councils are setting strict rules regarding what materials can be accepted, and imposing penalties for violators. Our Councils will not accept any coarse organics such as grass, deciduous leaves, and prunings. Burning has been prohibited here for years. The answer of course is composting.

Recently I visited most regional meetings as a guest speaker; the topic was "compost". The most frequent asked question, "How can I make quick compost?"



The most important aspect of high quality compost is the carbon (C) to nitrogen (N) ratio of the organic material used. Generally speaking the aim is to get a C/N ratio of approximately 30 to 1. Leaves from deciduous trees average 60/1, fresh grass 20/1, straw 80/1, vegetable scraps 15/1, fruit scraps 35/1, unbleached paper 150/1, fresh manure 12/1, bird droppings for example: chooks, pigeons 7/1.

These are not meant to be technical, but can be used as a guideline. Moisture is essential since dry material will not compost. Aeration is required to keep compost alive, compost is a living thing. The delicate trade-off between moisture and aeration is 50/50. You should be able to squeeze a drop or two of moisture as if from a tightly wrung sponge. Diversity of material is the heart and strength of compost. Diversity is the key. If you're still not sure what to use, ask yourself has it ever lived, if the answer is yes, compost it.

The compost bin should sit on well drained good bare soil. I always start with a 10cm layer of coarse moist material such as twigs or small prunings. This will allow the air from the bottom to enter the bin. Follow with a 5cm layer of fresh grass clippings, moist brown leaves layered, kitchen scraps layered, moist packaging material such as cereal boxes and egg cartons. I make sure I layer everything until the bin is fully crowded.

I don't wet the pile; I just cover it with hessian sack. Carpet underfelt can also be used. A tight fitting lid should be on top of the bin.

Compost made all at once is called "Hot Compost". If the C/N ratio is near right, compost will be ready for use in 28 days. The compost enclosure must hold at least 200 litres, of organic material to generate sufficient heat and a maximum of 400 litres for continuity of aeration. The enclosure I use holds 220 litres when fully crowded.

Well-made compost provides enormous benefits to your garden. Compost supplies humus alive with micro-organisms, all of which breaks the soil down into nutrients that can easily be absorbed by plant roots.

The compost when applied to your rose beds will make sick plants strong and strong plants stronger and disease resistant. Black gold I call it. Money cannot buy it - you have to make it.

In terms of overall waste reduction, composting is possibly the most important single factor for all of us to consider.

Mechanical aids such as sprayers and mowers should be cleaned during the dormant period. Hand tools can be sharpened and oiled as required. Make sure your Personal Protective Equipment is in good order; this is regularly neglected by home gardeners. Keep in mind; you are in charge of your own safety.



Seduction



Brass Band