K-STATE Extension
Master Gardener
Johnson County

Common Diseases and Pests in Roses

Growing Healthy Roses: Simple Habits for Happier Plants

Roses may be the divas of the garden, but with a little attention, they reward you with show-stopping blooms all season long. With so many cultivars available, there truly is a rose for every gardener and every garden. Still, even these superstars can fall victim to diseases and pests. The good news? A few smart gardening habits can make a world of difference—long before you ever need to reach for a pesticide.

Start with Smart Prevention

One of the simplest and most effective ways to keep your roses healthy is to remove and dispose of any diseased leaves or stems. Doing this regularly helps stop problems from spreading to the rest of the plant or to neighboring roses.

Choosing **certified, disease-resistant varieties** also gives you a strong head start. When planting, give each rose enough room to reach its mature size and prune them correctly as they grow. Good spacing and pruning mean better airflow—something roses love. Dry leaves and stems make it much harder for fungal diseases to take hold.

While you're at it, try to **water at the base of the plant** rather than overhead. Keeping the foliage dry is one of the easiest fungal-prevention tricks in the book. And don't forget the garden beds themselves—keeping weeds under control helps reduce hiding spots for insects that may lay eggs in the grass or soil.

Take Time to Identify the Problem

If you notice damage, pause before treating it. Properly identifying the disease or insect involved saves time and prevents unnecessary treatment. Often, simple organic solutions do the job beautifully, such as:

- Removing affected plant parts
- Knocking insects off with a strong stream of water
- Handpicking pests you can see

These methods are gentle on your roses—and on the environment.

If You Choose a Pesticide

Sometimes cultural and organic methods aren't enough. If you decide a pesticide is necessary, select one designed specifically for the insect or disease you're dealing with. Always follow the product's safety instructions closely, and spray **in the evening**, when pollinators like bees are far less active.

Common Diseases in Roses and Methods to Control

Crown Gall

- A bacterium (*Agrobacterium tumefaciens*) that enters roots, stems or branches through a plant wound. DNA from the bacteria is transferred to the plant and induces tumor growth (galls) by overproducing plant hormones.
- *A. tumefaciens* lives in soil and is spread through movement of contaminated soil, water and infected plant material

Control:

- Thoroughly disinfect tools used to prune or take cuttings from plants.
- Infected plants should be removed along with the surrounding soil and placed in the trash.[1]

Black Spot

- A common and potentially serious leaf disease, initially appearing as black spots on leaves.
- Black spot lesions are roughly circular and up to ½ inch in diameter. Initially appearing during periods of wet weather, first on lower leaves, it will spread to the entire plant if left untreated. Severe infection leads to yellowing of leaves and defoliation.
- Black Spot is caused by a fungus (*Diplocarpon rosae)* which is ubiquitous in rose leaf litter and infected rose canes. Spores of the fungus are easily spread to emerging leaves by wind or splashing rain.

Control:

- If infection is mild, pick off all infected leaves and remove any infected leaves from around the bush.
- Consider applying preventative fungicides to prevent and / or slow down infection:
    - Fungicides containing chlorothalonil, copper sulfate, and myclobutanil can be highly effective in controlling black spot.
    - Neem oil in addition to copper sulfate has been shown to provide some black spot control.[1]

Cankers

- Caused by various species of fungi (*Botryosphaeria, Leptosphaeria, Coniothyrium, Cryptosporella*) that enter healthy canes through wounds caused by winter injury, improper pruning, wind, hail damage, or flower cutting.
- Cankers can enlarge until they surround the cane and/or reach the base (crown) of the plant, spreading to other canes or killing the plant. Cankers commonly occur on roses that have been weakened by black spot, poor nutrition, or winter injury.

Control:

- Prune canes with disinfected tools to an outward facing bud with all cuts well below diseased areas.
- There are no fungicides available specifically for control of canker. Keep plants healthy by controlling black spot, powdery mildew, and insect pests. Remove and destroy all infected or dead portions of canes.[2]

Powdery Mildew

- A widespread and serious disease problem of roses, caused by the fungus, *Sphaerotheca pannosa* var. *rosae.* It appears as a grayish-white powdery substance on the surfaces of young leaves, shoots, and buds.
- Infected leaves may be distorted, and some leaf drop may occur. Buds may be distorted and fail to open.
- It can occur anytime during the growing season when temperatures are mild and relative humidity is high at night and low during the day.

Control:

- Remove and destroy diseased leaves and canes during the growing season. Rake up and destroy leaves under the plant in the fall.
- If disease is severe, select a fungicide that controls both black spot and powdery mildew. Fungicide sprays recommended for use in the home garden include propiconazole, thiophanate-methyl, myclobutanil, sulfur, neem oil or baking soda mixed with horticultural oil.[2]

Rose Mosaic Virus

- It has a wide range of symptoms, most evident in the spring but can be present throughout the growing season.
- It can appear as ringspots, wavy lines, chlorotic vein banding, an oakleaf pattern, a mosaic pattern, and a yellow net pattern.
- Infected plants become weakened and are more sensitive to damage caused by other stresses.

Control:

- Although the virus spreads slowly, infected plants cannot be saved and should be removed and placed in the trash.[3]

Rose Rosette

- An untreatable disease caused by the *Rose rosette virus* (RRV). The virus is introduced into the rose during feeding by the rose leaf curl mite (*Phyllocoptes fructipillus*). This extremely small mite feeds on the cell sap of tender stems and leaf petioles.
- Infected roses exhibit reddened terminal growth on branches. In addition, stems become thicker and more succulent than on unaffected parts of the plant. Infected stems exhibit an abnormally high number of thorns which may be green or red.
- Rose leaves on infected branches are smaller than normal. Lateral branches may grow excessively from main stems, creating a witches' broom symptom.

Control:

- Thoroughly disinfect pruning tools between infected and uninfected plants.
- Completely remove any infected roses (including roots) and place them in the trash.
- To deter the spread of mites from infected roses to healthy roses, space plants appropriately so they do not touch and treat nearby healthy roses with a bifenthrin spray every two weeks between April and September.[2]

Rose Replant Disease

- Also referred to as rose sickness or soil sickness disease. More often experienced in commercial nurseries where new roses are planted in the same location year after year. Homeowners can also experience this phenomenon when planting new roses where previous roses have been removed due to disease, pest infestations, or personal preferences for new rose varieties.
- Newly planted roses show symptoms of slow or stunted growth and/or minimal bloom production. Methods to invigorate the plant, i.e fertilizing or adding compost to improve soil health, fail. Symptoms can continue for a few years and will show up again if another new rose is planted in the same spot.

Control:

- No definitive cause has been identified. Planting new roses in different locations is an option as is replacing much of the soil from a removed rose before planting new roses in the same location.

Common Insect Pests in Roses and Methods to Control

Aphids

- Tiny, pear-shaped, soft-bodied insects that attack leaves and buds and suck out sap, distorting leaves and reducing the number and quality of blooms.
- Aphids excrete a honeydew substance that causes a dark-colored sooty mold to form on leaves.

Control:

- Aphids reproduce rapidly so it is important to address them quickly.
- Use a strong stream of water from a hose to spray off aphids from the top and bottom of leaves; repeat as needed.
- Alternatively, spray insecticidal soap every 5-7 days.[4] Use other contact or systemic insecticides as needed.

Spider Mites

- Like aphids, spider mites feed on plant sap, typically the underside of leaves. Signs of spider mite damage include spotted or stippled leaves that turn yellow and fall off as well as a fine webbing on the underside of the leaves.

Control:

- Use a strong stream of water from a hose to spray off aphids from the top and bottom of leaves; repeat as needed. An advantage of this method is that it does not harm beneficial insects and/or predators of spider mites.
- Alternatively, spray insecticidal soap, reapplying as needed. Water plants well before spraying and do not spray if temperatures exceed 85°F.[4]

- Sulfur sprays can also be used. Do not spray if daily temperatures exceed 85°F, and do not spray sulfur on plants within 30 days of a horticultural oil application.[4]

Japanese Beetles

- Adults are about ½ inch long and have a green body and legs with coppery-brown wing covers.[4]
- Adult beetles arrive in mid-summer, and feed on rose foliage, buds and flowers through August.

Control:

- Hand-picking and dropping them into soapy water is one of the easiest methods to control Japanese beetles. However, it must be done almost daily as beetles emerge every day for several weeks.
- Traps are not recommended for the home gardeners as they can often attract more beetles to the landscape than would normally be present.
- Applications of Milky Spore can be used against grubs (hatchlings from Japanese beetle eggs that overwinter in the soil) in the lawn. It must be applied to the entire lawn. It is very effective but does not protect against Japanese beetles that fly in from untreated, nearby lawns.
- Spot spraying insecticides labeled for Japanese beetles may reduce damage for several days, but multiple applications are required to maintain control.[5]

Thrips

- Thrips feed on plant sap. They can be difficult to spot with the naked eye. However, you can see them by lightly shaking or blowing on the blooms causing them to move around.
- Signs of thrip damage include flower buds that partially open or fall off completely, silvery-white or brown streaked petals, and brown edging on petals. Thrips prefer white or light-colored rose blossoms.

Control:

- Since thrips lay eggs in grasses, removal of weeds in rose beds can help.
- Remove and dispose of any infected rose blossoms.
- Insecticides can be sprayed but timing is critical as it must be applied before thrips enter the unopened flower bud. Multiple applications at 5–7-day intervals are often required to effectively control thrips. [4]

Rose Slug

- Rose slugs, the larvae of sawflies, feed on leaves. They can be mistaken for caterpillars.
- Damaged leaves will have translucent tissue between veins that may crumble and eventually turn brown.
- Feeding progresses quickly and may result in skeletonized leaves with only veins remaining.

Control:

- Handpick or remove by spraying water.
- Insecticidal soap and horticultural oil can also be used.

Leaf Cutter Bees

- Damage from leaf cutter bees is easily identified; perfect, semi-circular sections are cut out of leaves.
- Control: No control is recommended since damage is minor and only occurs to leaves. In addition, leaf cutter bees are important pollinators.

Sources

[1] UW Plant Disease Facts. Crab A, Hudelson, B. UW-Madison Plant Pathology, 02/2024 (online)
[2] HGIC, Clemson Cooperative Extension, Rose Diseases Factsheet, HGIC 2106, updated Apr 9, 2025 (online)
[3] Rose Mosaic Virus. K-State Research and Extension, 2021 (online)
[4] HGIC, Clemson Cooperative Extension, Rose Insects & Related Pests Factsheet, HGIC 2107, updated Oct 11, 2024 (online)
[5] Iowa State University, Japanese beetles are devouring my roses. What can I do? updated Dec 3, 2024 (online)

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