



Growing a rose garden need not be a daunting experience. It begins with selecting the rose varieties you want to plant, preparing the soil prior to planting, planting your roses, and providing care and maintenance throughout the year as needed. This guide will help you select the rose cultivars that are best for your growing location and help you create a maintenance and care plan that works for you.

Rose Selection

The American Rose Society recognizes over 40,000 named roses. With so many colors, sizes, bloom shapes and more, it can be overwhelming to select one. Fortunately, roses fall into specific classifications based on their growth habitats and blooming characteristics. All roses fall into 3 main groups: Species (wild roses), Old Garden roses (classes in existence before 1867) and Modern roses (classes in existence since 1867). Modern roses are more readily available, and we will focus on these classifications.

Modern Rose Classifications

- Hybrid Tea – beautiful fully formed, large, single blooms on long stems; excellent for cut flower gardening; plants grow from 2 to 5 feet tall
- Floribunda – plant height ranges from 1-1/2 to 2-1/2 feet tall; bears flowers in large clusters or tresses; blooms continually; easier to maintain than hybrid teas
- Grandiflora - cross between Hybrid Tea and Floribunda; plant heights range from 3-8 feet and produce blooms in clusters in cycles every 6 to 7 weeks; blooms more frequently than Hybrid Teas; excellent cut flower
- Polyantha – low growing plant with clusters of 1-inch blooms; best used as edging or in mass plantings
- Climbing – produces showers of clustered roses on long arching canes up to 20 feet long; requires support and training for abundant blooming
- Shrub – upright, bushy, low maintenance options; suitable as hedges or screens
- Miniatures or Miniflora – typically smaller in height and have tiny blooms less than 2 inches wide

As a general rule of thumb, most hybrid tea and grandiflora roses are bred with an emphasis on the form and beauty of the flower rather than ease of care and disease resistance. Floribunda roses are very hardy and require less care but vary widely in their disease resistance. Modern shrub roses are usually the best option for easy care. Regardless, it is important to always read the plant tag and description carefully to ensure you are selecting the rose that best meets your preferences, maintenance plans and your planting site.

Roses can be purchased as bare-root (in their dormant stage) or as an actively growing plant in a container. Bare-root plants come packaged without any soil around the roots. They should be planted in March as soon as the soil is workable and before they begin to leaf. Potted or container roses can be planted in April or May but should be done once there is no threat of frost.

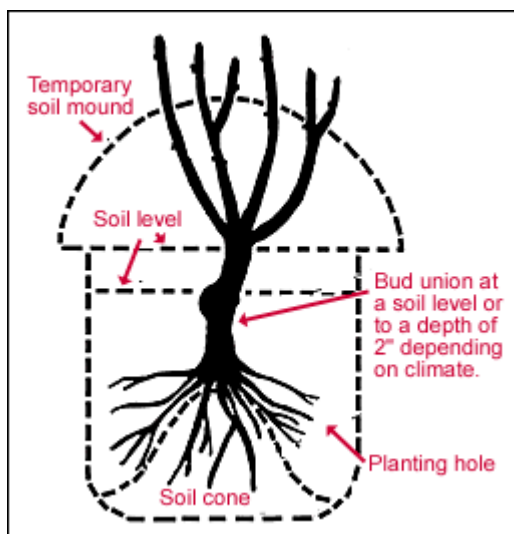
Prepare the Soil for Planting

Select a planting location that will receive at least six hours of full sun daily. Most roses will perform better with more sun. Early morning or late afternoon and evening sun are best, but with adequate water roses will do well in mid-day sun. The site needs to have good air circulation so that moisture on foliage and flowers can dry out, which helps to prevent fungal diseases. The best way to ensure good air circulation is to space plants based on their mature size and to prune appropriately.

If possible, obtain a soil test in the fall before planting the following spring. A soil test will enable you to properly amend your soil so that it drains well but retains moisture and so that it has the proper nutrients to support the rose's transition to your growing site. If a soil test is not readily available, plan to amend the soil to a depth of 18 to 24 inches with organic matter or compost.

Planting Bare-root Roses

Remember bare-root roses should be planted in March as soon as the soil is workable. Keep your bare-root rose cool until ready to plant. Prior to planting, prune out dead, damaged, disease or crossing canes, leaving 3 to 5 healthy canes. Cut the remaining canes back to 8-12 inches. If possible, seal cut ends with waterproof wood glue. Then soak the roots overnight in lukewarm water away from direct sunlight to ensure the roots are properly hydrated. Before planting, trim 1 inch off the roots to stimulate new growth.



When planting bare-root roses, dig a hole large enough to let the roots spread out without crowding or curving around the wall of the hole and allow some space for growth. A normal size hole would be about 18 x 18 inches with a firm mound of soil at the bottom.

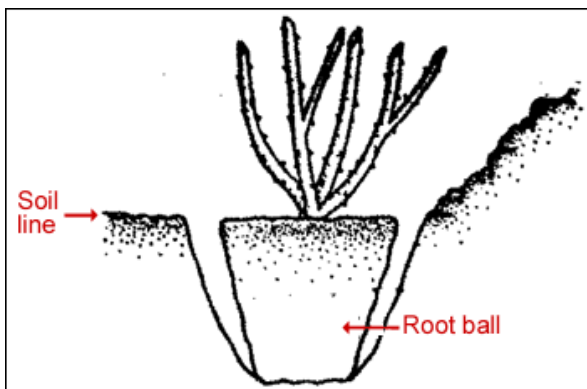
The roots should be spread over the mound of soil so that the bud union of a grafted rose is located 1 to 2 inches below the soil level. You will know you have a grafted rose if there is a rounded "knob" on the main stalk (the bud union). If your rose is not grafted (referred to as own-root), plant so that the crown is approximately 2 inches below the soil surface. The crown is where the roots meet the stem.

Partially fill the hole with soil, then firm the soil around the roots and water in. Fill the remainder of the hole with soil, firm it and water in.

To prevent desiccation, due to spring winds, the new dormant plant should be covered with a temporary soil mound (4-6 inches high) to protect emerging buds. Remove the soil mound when the first leaves appear.

Planting Container Roses

Once the threat of frost has passed, you can prepare to plant your container roses. This is also a good time to transplant any existing roses. Potted plants should be watered thoroughly prior to planting.



Dig a hole three times wider than the container and the same depth as the soil level in the container.

Place the rose in the center of the hole on solid undisturbed soil so the plant will not settle below soil surface level.

Use the soil removed from the planting hole for backfill and water in.

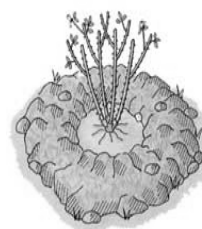
For both bare-root and container roses, water every 4-5 days for two weeks after planting. Place 2 to 3 inches of organic mulch around the base of the plant to suppress weeds, maintain stable soil temperature and moisture conditions.

Rose Care and Maintenance

Fertilizing, pruning, and watering may seem overwhelming at first but is relatively straightforward. Once you understand basic rose care, it is simply a matter of making time to care for your plants. Knowing that the care you give to your roses is returned to you with each beautiful bloom, makes the effort more than worthwhile.

Watering The single most important care you can give any rose plant is to provide adequate water. *Water at least one inch per week* (about six gallons). Avoid wetting the leaves as this encourages disease. Apply water to the soil around the base of the plant, and water early in the day so the leaves will dry quickly. Good drainage is also essential. Roses need continual moisture but do not like “wet feet.”

Mulching Yearly, in spring, mulch with 2 to 3 inches of organic matter to keep the weeds in check and to keep the soil cool and moist. Keep mulch away from the base of the canes.

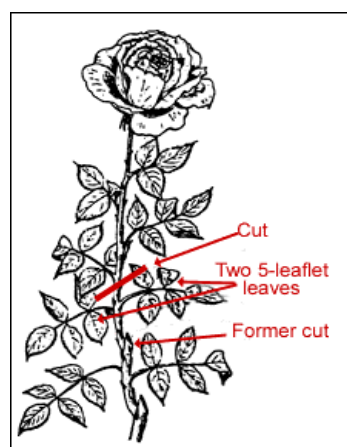


Fertilizing Newly planted roses should be fertilized once new growth is observed. Use fish emulsion for the first season to protect roots. After the first year, begin fertilizing in April and continue fertilizing once per month until August. This will help the rose slow bloom production in preparation for winter. Use a balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-10 or 13-13-13 and apply around the base of the plant according to the product's directions. An organic fertilizer such as alfalfa pellets or manure-based products may be used. Water roses both before and after fertilizing to prevent root burn.

Deadheading Throughout the growing season, remove fading or spent blooms on roses that continually bloom to encourage more flowering.

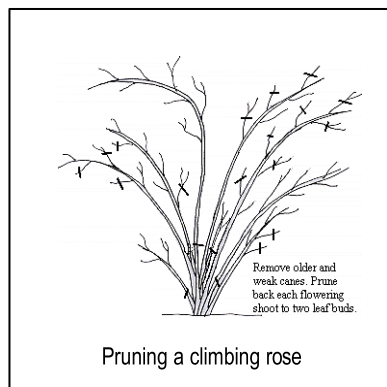
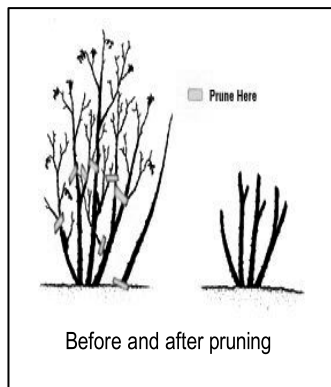
Remove the flower and stem by cutting to just above a bud or leaf that is pointing outward. A new stem and flower will grow just below the cut.

Stop deadheading at the end of August so bloom production slows in preparation for winter.



Pruning

Prune established roses once a year in early spring once roses have broken their dormancy stage. Signs that a plant has broken dormancy are bud swell and new green foliage. Cut back any dead, diseased, damaged, weakened or cross branched canes. Also prune away any canes that point toward the center of the plant. Prune the remaining canes down to 8 – 12 inches, leaving 3 to 5 healthy canes. This encourages the development of strong canes with an open growth habit to promote good air circulation. Wait to prune climbing roses until after their first flush of spring blooms.



Winter Care

In late fall, clean-up and dispose of fallen and diseased leaves from around the plant. Pull back existing mulch and spray a fungicide before covering the base with 8-10 inches of new mulch. This protects the plant from the freeze and thaw cycles in winter. Leave mulch in place until you begin pruning in the spring.

Preventing Disease and Insect Pests

Roses are susceptible to several diseases and can be damaged by insect pests. Many common rose diseases, including black spot, cankers and powdery mildew, can be prevented by spraying fungicides. Applications should be made every 7-14 days, depending on the severity of the infection. Most fungicides that are effective for blackspot are also effective for the control of powdery mildew and downy mildew. Check labels to be sure the product you are using is labeled for use against these diseases. Follow application guidelines for the product you choose. Removing dead leaves and applying mulch in the spring helps deter disease.

Insect infestations can be controlled with treatment at the first sign of problems. Be sure to use an insecticide that is labeled to treat the specific insect pest you are seeing. Common insect pests of roses include aphids, spider mites, thrips and rose midge. Some insect pests such as aphids and spider mites can be controlled by a hard water spray to the entire plant (even on the bottom of leaves); repeat sprays every few days to ensure the infestation is controlled.

It may seem that there are an overwhelming number of things to consider when growing roses. But in reality, roses offer something for every gardener. Hybrid Tea roses are perfect for the serious cut flower gardener. If you want a hardy, compact plant that blooms all summer long, then Floribunda is the one for you. Looking for a low-maintenance, disease resistant rose, then consider modern shrub roses. Remember to read plant labels carefully so you have all the details as you consider your options.

With a little effort and care, you will be able to participate in the best part of growing roses... enjoying the many blooms, colors and fragrances of your beautiful rose garden.

K-STATE

Extension

Master Gardener Johnson County

Extension Master Gardener Hotline

(913) 715-7050

Email: garden.help@jocogov.org

For your lawn, garden and horticultural questions

Revised 2026

Publications from Kansas State University are available at www.ksre.ksu.edu. Date shown is that of publication or last revision. Contents of this publication may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. All other rights reserved. In each case, credit the authors, Publication Title, Kansas State University, Month Year. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Extension, Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts. Kansas State University is an equal opportunity provider and employer. This publication will be made available in an accessible alternative format or in languages other than English upon request. Please contact ksrebookstore@ksu.edu to request translation services.