WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

# GROWING ROSES IN WASHINGTON STATE: A SEASONAL CALENDAR

**Home Garden Series**

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# Growing Roses in Washington State: A Seasonal Calendar

## Introduction

Growing roses in Washington State gardens is easy, but regular care and maintenance is needed to keep them healthy and attractive. This calendar is a quick guide to the year-round tasks required to grow beautiful roses. The calendar is organized by season rather than month because the timing of these tasks varies from region to region.

## Spring

Plant bare-root roses as soon as they are available and before new growth begins. Potted roses may also be planted at this time.

Perform a soil test and if the results indicate any nutrient deficiencies, fertilize your rose bushes before new growth begins. Apply fertilizers containing only the deficient nutrients as indicated by soil test results. Take particular care with fertilizers containing phosphorus (phosphate) including bone meal because phosphorous runoff is a problem in Washington State. Do not use these fertilizers unless test results indicate a need. (Refer to the WSU publication, *A Home Gardener's Guide to Soils and Fertilizers* for more information.)

Pruning roses in the spring is part of the regular maintenance needed to keep roses healthy and attractive (Figure 1). Prune your roses around the time forsythia (bright yellow flowered shrub) blooms (Figure 2). Forsythia bloom times vary across the state, depending on climate and temperature, but they are better indicators of pruning time than using a calendar date.

When new growth begins, apply recommended fungicides for preventative control of powdery mildew (Figure 3) or black spot (Figure 4), especially if these fungi have affected the plant in past seasons. See the WSU publication, *Hortsense* for information on controlling these diseases on roses. Recommended systemic fungicides provide a proactive approach to disease control and should be considered in regions where fungal diseases are troublesome.

This is often on the western side of the state, where there is a higher annual rainfall. Instructions on the product label for the safe use of any pesticide should be read carefully and followed closely. (For more information on pesticide precautions, refer to the WSU publications, *Safe Handling of Pesticides* and *Learning about Labels*.)

Figure 1. Pruning roses in the spring is part of the regular maintenance needed to keep roses healthy and attractive. (Photo by Beverly Eades, WSU Master Gardener.)


Figure 2. Prune roses in spring about the time forsythia is in bloom. (Photo by Denise Ellsworth, Ohio State University, Bugwood.org.)


Figure 3. Powdery mildew is one of the diseases you should look for on roses in the spring. (Photo by Clemson University, USDA Cooperative Extension Slide Series, Bugwood.org.)


Figure 4. Black spot is one of the fungal diseases that you should look for and control through the season, especially in western Washington where it is prevalent. (Photo by Clemson University, USDA Cooperative Extension Slide Series, Bugwood.org.)

As new growth begins, watch for evidence of aphids (Figure 5), and treat them while populations are still small. One non-chemical way to treat for aphids is to avoid applying high rates of nitrogen (N) through applications of nitrogen-containing fertilizers. Excessive nitrogen encourages succulent new growth favorable to aphid populations. A strong stream of water may also be used to dislodge aphids.


Figure 5. Check your roses regularly for aphids and other insect pests as soon as new growth begins. (Photo by Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org.)

Apply a layer of coarse organic mulch 3 to 4 inches deep to suppress weed germination, discourage weed growth, and maintain soil moisture in rose beds. Possible mulches include wood chips, shredded bark, coarse compost, and crushed nut shells. (See *Mulching Woody Ornamentals with Organic Materials* from Oregon State University for more information on mulches.)

## Summer

Potted rose plants may still be planted even after new growth has begun. Roses are most likely to survive and thrive when planted in early summer, before the high temperatures of midsummer arrive.

Watch for signs of aphids and flower thrips and manage them according to the WSU publication, *Hortsense* recommendations. Consider the use of beneficial insects, which may help manage insect pests that attack roses.

Roses grow best in evenly moist soil. Irrigate roses as needed when the top 2 inches of soil become dry. Soil moisture can be checked by inserting a trowel or small shovel and observing the amount of moisture in the soil. The soil should be moist, not wet, to a depth of 8–12 inches.

The amount and frequency of watering will depend on the amount of precipitation in your area, as well as type of soil, temperature, sun exposure, and wind. When irrigating, avoid wetting plant foliage by using drip irrigation or soaker hoses. If this is not possible, water in the morning so foliage will dry quickly, avoiding the risk of potential diseases. (For more information on drip systems, refer to the WSU publication, *Drip Irrigation for the Yard and Garden*.)

Modern roses, including hybrid tea, floribundas, grandiflora, and multifloras, bloom more than once during the summer. After the first bloom, "deadhead" these roses to encourage rebloom (Figure 6). Deadheading is the removal of spent flowers by pruning back to a three or five leaflet on the flowering stem (cane) below the flower. When possible, prune to an outward-facing bud (Figure 7). This will promote an open center and allow for greater airflow throughout the bush, again helping to avoid potential diseases. To allow the plants to prepare for winter dormancy, do not deadhead roses in late summer. Pruning in late summer or fall can encourage new growth, which is more vulnerable to winter damage from cold temperatures. Continue to monitor for insect pests, such as aphids, and diseases, such as black spot and powdery mildew.

## Fall

Continue to irrigate the rose shrubs when the soil is dry.

To prevent the spread of disease, clean up fallen leaves around the plants. Remove and destroy virus-infected plants, and plan on replacing them next spring. Prune out any dead or diseased canes.

After several hard frosts, cut back only the vigorous long canes to prevent wind damage and the possibility of wind uprooting plants over the winter. Do not prune rose canes back close to the ground because this may leave them more vulnerable to injury from severe cold temperatures.

To protect tender rose shrubs from cold winter temperatures, mound loose mulch, such as shredded leaves, compost, pine needles, or sawdust, over the base of the plants. Do this after the plant is dormant and before hard frost is expected. Mulch provides a layer of insulation that will provide some protection during the winter months.

Tree roses require special care when preparing them for winter because their graft, which is the swollen area on the trunk that is the point at which the scion (top cultivar) bud is inserted into the bark of the rootstock to create a "tree" rose, is located higher on the stem or main trunk.

Figure 6. Spent flowers should be removed after the first bloom to encourage a second set of blooms later in summer.

Figure 7. Prune to an outward-facing bud to promote an open center and allow for greater airflow throughout the bush, helping to avoid potential diseases.

This means it is not protected by the mulch at the shrub base. To protect these roses, loosen the soil and roots on one side of the plant, approximately one foot or a little more from the shrub base. Then carefully lay the plant down on the ground on the opposite side. You may want to use wire anchoring pins to hold the plant in this position. Then bury the plant under a thick layer of coarse, well-drained organic material for protection from severe cold temperatures. Tree roses in pots can be overwintered by storing them in a garage or shed, where the temperature does not drop far below freezing.

Before planting, and every five years thereafter, have your soil tested to determine what, if any, nutrients are needed. Apply fertilizer containing only the deficient nutrients indicated by the soil test results. Complete fertilizers are rarely needed and using them will result in the application of excess nutrients.

## Winter

If your roses were infected with powdery mildew or black spot during the season, remove any remaining leaves on the shrubs and dispose of them. Consider removing cultivars that are susceptible to disease and insect pests and replacing them with resistant cultivars to reduce your use of pesticides. For help in selecting the right cultivars, consult the *American Rose Society's Handbook for Selecting Roses* available on the American Rose Society website.

Disinfect, clean, and sharpen your rose pruning equipment. (See *Pruning Equipment for Home Gardeners*.)

Consider purchasing garden gloves with leather or canvas gauntlets to protect your arms when pruning your roses next spring.

## References

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Use pesticides with care. Apply them only to plants, animals, or sites as listed on the label. When mixing and applying pesticides, follow all label precautions to protect yourself and others around you. It is a violation of the law to disregard label directions. If pesticides are spilled on skin or clothing, remove clothing and wash skin thoroughly. Store pesticides in their original containers and keep them out of the reach of children, pets, and livestock.





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