

The Basics of Rose Care

A guide to growing rose bushes in Colorado



One of the most important steps when planting a rose in Colorado is doing a little research to determine which types of roses are the most suited to your area. Most rose bush deaths arise from improper watering or wind desiccation, especially during the cold months.

The following are the basics for keeping and caring for roses in Colorado: recommendations for planting time by location, rose care "by the holidays", ideal location, soil, planting, watering, fertilizing, varieties of roses, and their most common ailments.

Local Planting Times

Roses should be planted after danger of frost has passed.

Denver - after April 15

Aurora - after April 30

Parker - after May 15

Castle Rock - after May 22

Elizabeth & Franktown - after May 30

By the Holidays

St. Patrick's Day - Begin removing two inches of winter mound material every few days.

April Fool's Day - Plants can be uncovered.

Mother's Day - Fertilize and prune, weather permitting.

June 15th - Fertilize.

July 31 - August 15 - Last fertilization

Late August - Start cutting back on water to encourage dormancy.

Halloween - Mound plants about 12" for winter if there have been three consecutive nights with temperatures below 25°.

Location

All roses are sun worshippers, and most do just fine in the sun.

The best locations for bright sun are:

- East or southeast

At a Glance

Hardiness - Choose roses that will thrive in your area.

More hardy: shrub/hedge, climber, miniature, rugosa, species/old garden

Less hardy: hybrid tea, floribunda, grandiflora

Location: Most roses do well in the sun, but some like part shade. Think east, southeast, west or southwest, south. Research your particular species.

Soil: Amend with 1/3 compost to 2/3 native soil.

Water: Apply at soil level, avoiding leaves, only when needed.

Fertilizer: Newly planted roses should NOT be fertilized. For established roses, we recommend Mile High Rose Food once monthly, mid-April through mid-August.

- West or southwest
- South

The worst locations are:

- Any area that gets less than 5 hours of sun
- Any area that is constantly moist
- Areas with rock as mulch
- Un-terraced hillsides
- Excessively windy areas
- *Note:* Hybrid tea types prefer to be grouped with other hybrid teas. Because their blooms are large, their moisture needs are greater. This type of rose would benefit from a part shade area to help conserve water. Also, grafted (or budded) roses, as well as hybrid teas, have fair to poor survival records at elevations over 6500 feet, as most are not cold hardy.

Soil

Improving the existing soil’s moisture absorption, retention, or drainage is referred to as “amending”, and is crucial to rose gardening success in Colorado. Many local gardeners have clay soil, which, when compacted, absorbs moisture at a slow rate and creates runoff, but when wet, is slow to dry out. This translates to either a long, low pressure watering period or a series of short watering periods to achieve the required moisture depth without runoff.

Amend soil with compost, perlite, aged manure (2-3 years), dried grass clippings, small wood chips, or a combination of any of these at a rate of one part amendment to two parts native soil. It’s important to mix well throughout the soil. This speeds up the absorption rate, aids in fertility (attracting beneficial microorganisms and earthworms), increases air circulation in the soil, and promotes timely drainage to deter root rot.

Check the drainage rate of the proposed area first to see if you should amend.

Step 1: Dig a hole 1’ deep and fill with water.

Step 2: When the water seeps out, refill, but keep track of how long it takes to drain. If it drains within the hour, amending isn’t necessary. If you weren’t able to get to step 2, you should consider either another area, a container, or a raised bed.

Important Note: A raised bed should be comprised of 2/3 native soil and 1/3 amendment, because if soil in the raised bed is over-amended with soil of a lighter texture, while it sits atop compacted clay, water will travel the path of least resistance, through the over-amended soil. Every air pocket will fill with water before being absorbed by the compressed soil below, resulting in diseased, buggy, or drowned plant material.

If your area drains quickly (15 minutes or less), consider incorporating a one to one ratio of amendment to soil for longer moisture retention.

Planting

Tagawa’s rose department recommends that all roses planted in Colorado be planted deeply. The graft, or swollen area where the rose canes join the main trunk, should be 3” below the soil line. This area is prone to cold, dry weather. *Note:* Own root roses should be planted half as deep.

Watering

- Water precisely and thoroughly when using moisture-saving techniques to ensure good health and growth.
- Roses do not like having their leaves sprayed with water, so take care to aim water at soil level.
- Properly amend planting area to improve absorption rate.

- Take advantage of part shade areas when possible.
- Plant in groups, especially Hybrid Teas.
- Position soaker hoses through rose beds and bury with 3" of mulch. Put mulch 6" away from trunk of the rose bush to determine moisture content of your soil.
- Do not water more quickly than soil can absorb.
- If using a deep root feeder for watering, insert 6" from the main trunk to a depth of 2-3". Water 2 minutes for each insertion, with 2-3 insertions for roses 3-5' tall.
- Slight limpness of new growth *and* dry soil tell you when to water.

Fertilizing

Our rose department recommends **no fertilizing** of newly planted roses because you should determine if the rose will thrive in the area without the use of fertilizer.

Fertilizing a rosebush that is not doing well can worsen its condition or kill it.

Exception: Newly-planted container roses should be fertilized every other week from May through mid-August to counter nutrient leaching due to frequent watering.

Fertilize established roses (those that have been in your landscape for more than 1 growing season) once a month during the spring and summer months. Use half the recommended rate to cut down on salt build-up in the soil. Begin fertilizing in mid-April (May for higher elevations). End in mid-August (early August for higher elevations). A great organic fertilizer to use as directed is Mile High Rose Feed. A good alternative is Gro-Rich Rose and Perennial Food.

Types of Roses

At Tagawa, our Rose Department offers 11 types of roses. These are, in order of hardiness (toughness): shrub/hedge, groundcover, miniature, floribunda, English, climber, grandiflora, hybrid tea, and tree rose.

Of these types, shrubs and groundcover roses are gaining in popularity over the hybrid teas and floribundas because most are on their own root, offer less fuss, are drought and cold tolerant, and tend to bloom more. Hybrid teas and floribundas offer a wider color range, fragrance, and beautiful blooms, but the majority are grafted, require more water, need wind protection, and a particular pruning routine.

Common Rose Problems

Most insect or disease problems are the result of a rosebush that is unhappy about one or both of the following: its location and its care.

Most rose diseases like powdery mildew, rust, and black spot are moisture related. Water only when roses and surrounding soil require it, not according to temperature or on a set schedule. If the rose develops a water-related issue, collect as many infected leaves as possible, and treat with a fungus spray made for roses.

Insects like aphids and spider mites attack tender new growth of a stressed rose. For severe infestations, prune off the most heavily-infested areas or hose off with water. To diminish the plant's unhappiness, apply a systemic insecticide to protect future new growth while adjusting the sprinkler to offer less or more moisture.

Another big problem is the rose cane borer. This insect tunnels down the center of a recently pruned rose cane, leaving a hollowed-out, near-dead cane or rosebush.

All damaged canes should be pruned back to solid cane and capped with white liquid glue.

All pruned canes should be treated this way, as it is a very effective deterrent for future damage.