
Winter Rose Care FAQ

A guide to commonly asked rose care questions for colder weather



How late can I plant new roses?

Mid-October for the Denver Metro area is the recommended cut-off point. Areas that are more open or at higher elevations should consider early to mid-September as the end of rose planting season.

How often should I water my roses?

Shorter days and cooler temperatures mean that watering frequency should be scaled back. Our goal is to winter-water established plants once a month from November through March, and twice a month on newly planted material. When supplementing winter water, only do so when there is no snow cover near or in your rose beds, and when the mid-day temperature is 40 degrees or above. Try to water the top 6-8" of the soil surrounding the roses. Lay your hose at the base of the roses and water slowly until your moisture goal is achieved.

Should I fertilize my roses?

All fertilization of roses in the Denver Metro area should cease by mid-August. Areas that are more open or at higher elevations should stop at the beginning of August. This allows for acclimation for the coming cooler temperatures.

When should I prune my roses?

We recommend that no major pruning be done in the fall for the Denver Metro and surrounding areas. However, it is okay to prune any dead, damaged, or diseased canes as well as any wildly overgrown canes. If you are worried about snow damage to taller rose bushes, prune off no more than 1/3 of the height to reduce likelihood. One-time-blooming roses should be pruned to shape after flowering, and no later than July.

Is now a good time to transplant roses?

You can transplant now, provided you have watered and pruned the rose bush back by 1/2 its height 1 hour prior to transplanting, to reduce the symptoms of transplant shock. After transplanting, water again to reduce premature dehydration. Allow the top 2" of soil to dry before thoroughly watering again. The best time to transplant roses is in spring, before full leaf-out.

Should I cover my roses now?

The first day of fall does not mean you have to cover your roses. They must first experience a hard freeze in order to begin the dormancy process. After the leaves have withered and dried, gently knock off as many as you can with a broom and discard. You may then begin covering or mounding your roses with mulch material (about 1' high in the center crown of the bush) for the winter. Hybrid Teas, climbers, English, and Floribundas need this treatment more than shrub, miniature, and groundcover roses.

What kind of mulching material is suitable for covering roses?

Soil, dried tree leaves, chipped or shredded bark, dried grass clippings, topsoil, or a combination of any of these is suitable rose-mounding material. Unsuitable are the dried rose leaves. You should remove the danger of hidden diseases or insects having an early start on weakening the roses for next year.

Can my potted patio roses over-winter outside?

Colorado's dry winter season can pose serious freeze damage to a root system that is above the soil line. Although it is possible with shrub, groundcover, and miniature roses, it is not recommended that roses over-winter in outdoor pots. The best options are to plant them in the ground or move potted plants to the garage or the south side against the home for protection and dormancy's sake. Remember to water 1 to 2 times a month during this time.

Can tree roses be brought indoors to flower over the winter?

Tree roses require the coldness of the garage for dormancy purposes. In Colorado, they should not be planted in the landscape because of the temperature-sensitive graft just below the branching area. This acts like an exposed root system and it would result in the death of the branches. After exposure to a cold spell that induces dormancy, move to a naturally lit area in the garage, or to a southern, protected outside area against your home. Water 1-2 times a month during the winter.

How can I protect my climbing roses for the winter?

Mound the crown of the climbing rose 12-18" high with mulching material mentioned previously.