

# Winterizing Roses

A guide to protecting and caring for roses in the cold winter months



To winterize your rose bushes simply means to give them added insulation (mulch, straw, etc.) around the base of the plant after they have experienced a prolonged freeze that induces dormancy. The purpose of this is to protect them from warm spells during the cold months that could promote premature growth.

The following will help ease the transition from growing to dormancy:

## Steps for Success

1. Stop fertilizing roses after early August. Roses slow their growth in preparation for cold weather dormancy, and fertilization stimulates growth. This new growth is easily damaged by a sudden temperature drop and can place undue stress on the rose.
2. Discontinue deadheading in August. When spent flower heads turn into rose hips, it is a sign that the plant is preparing for dormancy.
3. Keep rose bushes healthy and free of disease during the summer. A healthy rose has a better chance of surviving a harsh winter.
4. What kind of roses do you have? Grafted roses, like Hybrid Teas, are the most tender. The graft (also called the bud union- the swelling on the stem below the branches) is temperature sensitive. This graft point should be 3" below the soil line for added winter protection. You can add soil to an already planted rose in order to achieve this depth. If the rose dies back to the graft but the roots are alive, it will send shoots up to grow a new, different rose bush.
  - a. Begin using insulating materials and rose collars after the rose has gone dormant, keeping in mind that rose collars aren't as necessary for shrub roses or climbing roses. Depending on your location, dormancy might happen anywhere from September to the end of November. If you have had at least 2 hard frosts below 25°, the rose should show signs of dormancy.
5. Clean up leaf debris around roses, especially if you have been battling insects and diseases all summer. This will cut down on repeat problems in the spring. *Tip:* Spray winter canes with an anti-desiccant to cut down on premature moisture loss from winter winds.
6. Prune damaged and dead canes, but otherwise, **do not prune** at this time. Pruning inhibits the natural hardening-off of tissues, and increases the likelihood of winter kill. In most cases, it stimulates growth, which is tender. It's best to wait until after the worst winter weather has passed. In more exposed areas, long stems may be cut back a little to prevent damage from snow. Save any substantial pruning for spring.

## At a Glance

**Stop fertilizing in August.**

**Stop deadheading in August.**

Once roses enter dormancy (approximately mid-October to mid-November), *protect with insulating material* like mulch and rose collars.

Unless removing damaged or dead canes, **do not prune!**

**Water twice monthly in the winter** during snowless periods, as long as temperatures are above 40° F.

**Don't start removing winter protection until at least St. Patrick's Day**, with the bulk of protection removed by April Fool's Day.

7. Use mulch. For tender roses, using a rose collar helps to hold the mulch in place and keep out hungry critters like rabbits. On tender roses, add mulch up to 12" to protect from dry winter air and extreme temperature fluctuations in early spring. The transition from winter into spring is when roses suffer the most damage.
8. Water your roses twice a month during snowless periods.
9. Do not remove protection or prune too early in the spring. Late season freezes can kill tender new growth or blacken canes stimulated by recent pruning.

## How to Use Rose Collars

Rose collars are a simple reusable plastic that wraps around the base of a rose bush during dormancy to protect/insulate from drastic temperature changes common in this area.

### Start with a dormant rose bush

Begin applying rose collars after a sustained freeze near 30 degrees, usually around mid-October through mid-November depending on location. Rose should show signs of dormancy with leaf dieback beginning.



### Form a Cylinder

Form a cylinder with the rose collar around the base of the bush and secure. The collar can be placed an inch into the ground for extra security.

### Fill to the Top with Mulch

Add mulch into the cylinder until it is filled to the top. Do not compact the material. Mulch can be purchased or can be dried tree leaves, pine needles, grass clippings, and soil all coming from your own garden. Do not use diseased or infected garden material.



- Remember to winter water your roses if snow melt has been less than plentiful. Water at the base of the rose and not in the collar itself.
- Begin to slowly remove material from rose collars around St. Patrick's Day and fully remove by April Fool's Day. Do not be tempted by new growth in late winter, as surprise freezes can damage your rose before the growing season begins.
- Rose collars help protect roses that are grafted to a root stalk, as is the case with most hybrid teas, some floribundas, and some grandifloras. Many shrubs and climbing varieties do not require rose collars but could benefit from a light mulch around the base of the stem.