



Growing Roses in the Upper Midwest

~ Don Kinzler, NDSU Extension Agent - Cass County Horticulture

Traditional rose classifications, as seen in catalogs or tags: hybrid tea, floribunda, grandiflora, climber, hybrid musk, miniature, old garden rose, polyantha, tree rose, species wild rose, and shrub rose.

Classification by hardiness. In our region, the most useful rose classification is by winter hardiness.

- Hardy (Survive without winter protection.) See shrub rose list on next page.
- Crown hardy (Canes often die back but can regrow from base. Best if covered.)
Often mistakenly labeled as “hardy.” See list on next page.
- Tender (Winter protection is a must.) - hybrid tea, floribunda, grandiflora all classes listed other than shrub roses and wild species. Includes David Austin roses (crosses between hybrid teas and old roses)

Preferred locations for growing roses: Well-drained soil high in organic material. Add three or four inches of compost, peat, manure into soil.

- Full sun is best, or at least six hours of direct sunlight each day. Avoid hot, intense locations.
- Locate roses in an area that catches good snow cover, which is a natural insulator.

Purchasing rose bushes

- Roses are termed “own-root” or “grafted.” Own-root are preferred; they’ll grow back “true” if tops are injured.
- Bareroot plants can be soaked overnight. After planting, mound with moist compost to “sweat” so buds open.
- Potted roses can be planted all growing season, but earlier planting helps them establish better before winter
- Where to buy: Local garden centers are more likely to have the truly hardy types, more so than national chains.

How to plant roses.

- Amend soil. Add generous handfuls of peat, compost or manure in each planting hole, and mix in.
- Plant deeply. First find the “crown” between canes and roots. (If grafted, there’s a knob.) Locate the crown about 3 to 4 inches below soil surface. This will provide greater winter survival.
- Water well immediately following planting.

Watering - Roses love moisture. Water when the top 2 inches of soil are dry, then saturate once or twice per week.

- Avoid overhead sprinkling because it greatly increases diseases. Instead, water only the soil, avoiding foliage.
- Water early in the day, so foliage and stems dry long before evening.

Fertilizing - Roses are considered “heavy feeders,” and respond well to fertilizing, either organic or inorganic.

- Begin fertilizing in spring, as new growth begins. For new roses, fertilize at planting time.
- Granular or water-soluble work fine. Follow label directions for amounts and frequency.
- Fertilize monthly until mid-July, then stop, because later fertilizing causes tenderness, increasing winter injury.

Mulch - Roses prefer cool, moist soil. Choose organic mulches like shredded wood products.

- Mulch greatly enhances rose growth, keeping soil cool and conserving moisture.
- Landscape rock can become very hot, adversely affecting rose growth. Roses prefer organic mulch.

Pruning - The best time to prune is in April, before new growth begins.

- Newly planted roses usually don’t need pruning, but pruning each year thereafter is essential.
- Prune back winter-injured canes. Injured parts are black and brittle. Live canes are green or green/brown.
- Prune out old dead canes back to ground level. Thin out small, weak, crisscrossing canes.
- Don’t prune in fall because it can increase winter injury.
- Reducing the height of very long canes in spring promotes well-branched plants. Pruned roses bloom better.

Deadheading - term that means removing the faded, “spent” flowers.

- Helps encourage repeat blooming.
- Remove blossoms just as the petals are about to fall. Dispose of blossoms. Don’t leave on ground (diseases.)
- Cut down to a five-leaflet leaf. Cutting down to three-leaflet leaves result in “blind” shoots.
- Stop deadheading by early August. Allowing flowers to mature after that date improves winter survival.

Disease control - Some rose varieties are more resistant to foliage diseases like black spot and powdery mildew.

- Most rose diseases are caused by fungi, which thrive when foliage remains wet, or in humid weather.
- Prevention is a necessity, because once leaves are affected, they don’t revert to normal
- Prevent disease by avoiding overhead sprinkling, and don’t water in the evening.
- Disease preventative rose sprays must be applied before symptoms appear, or very quickly thereafter.

Insect control - Systemic rose insecticides work well. Apply as granules to the soil, and plants are protected internally.

- Many rose sprays are combination fungicide disease preventatives and insecticides.

Rabbit, rodent and deer control - Rose canes are very tasty in winter. Circles of wire mesh are the best defense.

Winter protection - All roses except the very hardiest benefit from winter protection. It’s vital for tender types.

- Apply winter protection in early November after hard freezes, but before temperatures become frigid. It’s best if foliage drops before covering, but sometimes it clings to canes.
- If the fall has been dry, water well in October.
- Mound the crown with 2 feet of leaves, straw, wood mulch. A circle of wire helps keep mulch high and intact.
- Styrofoam rose cones alone are rarely enough. Cut out the top, fill with leaves, and reattach with duct tape.
- Remove winter protection in early April before growth. Keep covering close in case of frigid temps.

Hardy shrub roses. (Usually survive without winter protection.)

1. Canadian Parkland Series: Adelaide Hoodless (red), Cuthbert Grant (dark red), Hope for Humanity (deep red), Morden Blush (light pink), Morden Centennial (pink), Morden Fireglow (scarlet), Morden Ruby (ruby red), Morden Snowdrift (white), Morden Sunrise (apricot to yellow), Prairie Joy (pink), Winnipeg Parks (red), Marshall’s Peace Garden (creamy white), Canada Blooms (pink with good flower form and fragrance.)
2. Canadian Artist Series: Emily Carr (medium red), Felix Lecler (medium pink), Bill Reid (yellow) Campfire (tricolor purple-red, white, yellow), Oscar Peterson (white)
3. Canadian Explorer Series: Alexander Mackenzie (deep red), Champlain (dark red), J.P. Connell (lemon yellow), John Cabot (medium red), John Davis (Medium pink), Lambert Closse (pink), Charles Albanel (light red), DeMontarville (pink), Frontenac (pink), George Vancouver (red), Henry Kelsey (rosy-red), Louis Jolliet (pink), Quadra (dark red), Royal Edward (pink), Simon Fraser (pink), William Baffin (rosy-pink), William Booth (red)
4. Other hardy shrub roses: Hansa (rosy-red), Harrison Yellow, Persian Yellow, Lillian Gibson (pink), Topaz Jewell (yellow), Purple Pavement Rugosa rose (purple-red), Snow Pavement Rugosa rose (white), Therese Bugnet (pink), Woods Wild Rose (pink)

Crown-hardy roses. (Less winter hardy and benefit from winter protection. Often dieback to crown and may winterkill if not covered. Often misleadingly labeled as “hardy.”

Types include Carefree Beauty and Carefree Series, Chuckles, Knockout Series, Meideland Series, Prairie Celebration, Prairie Harvest, Prairie Star, Winter Sunset, Seafoam, Easy Elegance Series, Oso Easy Series

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