

# Pruning Roses

For centuries, gardeners have prized the full, showy, fragrant blossoms of the rose. Proper irrigation, fertilization, and pest control are all necessary for the best blooms. However, there is one more important task: Pruning. Pruning roses helps make them more productive and less prone to diseases and insects. The following simple pruning tips will get you started.

Late winter or early spring is the best time to prune most roses, especially if the plant is severely over-grown. The plant is dormant thus reducing the chances of shock, and there is no foliage in the way to obscure your view. However, many of the antique varieties and the species roses that only bloom once per year can be lightly pruned after they are done blooming.

All roses must be pruned for air circulation and weak stem removal. As a rose bush matures, the center tends to become over-crowded. This dense growth has limited air circulation and is more susceptible to disease. Remove enough branches to allow good airflow. Branches that cross and rub against each other should also be removed. Weak stems cannot support blooms and tend to become leggy. Old, dark-colored, and cracked canes should be removed, cutting them off at ground level. Healthy canes will be either green or white on the inside.

Shrub roses require very little pruning. Removing old wood and some light shaping is all that is necessary. Again, try to keep the center open so air can circulate, reducing the threat of disease. If the plant has been neglected, it may be necessary to renovate the plant in stages. Each year, remove about one-third of the oldest branches, making room for vigorous young stems to take their place. If you try to prune out too much wood the first year, you may kill the plant.

Climbing roses also need very little pruning. After the plant is three to four years old, you can cut out some of the older canes at the base to rejuvenate the plant. Exceptionally long canes can be pruned back approximately one-third to increase their flowering potential.

All cuts should be made with sharp, clean pruners that have been disinfected periodically with alcohol. Bleach is an effective disinfectant, but will cause the pruners to rust. Make pruning cuts at an angle, 1/8" to 1/4" above an outward-facing bud. If cuts are made too close to a bud, the bud will not grow. If they are made too far away, the remaining portion of the canes will die. Pruning to an outward-facing bud redirects the plant's growth away from the center.

Finally, spent flowers can be cut off throughout the summer to encourage new flowering shoots. This is called "dead-heading". Dead-heading will redirect the plant's energy into producing more flowers instead of seed. The plant will look more attractive too. You should stop dead-heading in August. The shrub will then slow its growth and produce attractive rose hips for winter interest. Antique varieties and species roses that bloom only once each year should not be dead-headed if you want rose hips in the fall.

Pruning roses should not be a difficult or daunting task. It just takes some practice and patience. Following these guidelines will lead you to a garden full of vibrant rose blossoms!



**Finke Gardens & Nursery**  
*Bringing Life to Your Home*

---

500 N. 66 Street • 466-1995 • [www.finkegardens.com](http://www.finkegardens.com)