

Autumn Rose Care

Despite their popularity, roses are not always reliably hardy. Some varieties are naturally less hardy than others. In many cases, however, it is the cultural care that increases or decreases the plant's survival ability. Here are a few tips to help your roses winter over successfully.

Ideally, roses should not be fertilized after August 1st because this stimulates tender new growth. Stop pruning plants in September. Leave the dead blossoms on the plants. As the rose hips mature, the plant hardens off, becoming more tolerant of winter extremes.

In general, the only time major pruning is recommended in the autumn is if the roses are covered with rose cones. If this is the case, the pruning should be done after all the leaves fall from the bush, generally in late October or even in November. This is because an earlier pruning may stimulate new growth if the autumn is warm. This new growth would be extremely susceptible to cold damage.

Whether the plants require winter protection is highly debatable, with many rose growers providing no protection and others going to great extremes. If you decide to protect your plants, keep in mind that the objective is to keep plants cold so that they will not initiate tender new growth during winter and early spring thaws. Methods for providing winter protection include mounding up straw or leaves. You may also mound soil over the tender crown but do not take that soil from around the plant's roots. Mounding should be done after the soil has frozen which is generally between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Styrofoam rose cones which cover the entire plant are popular but not without problems. If placed over the plants too early they may retain so much heat that growth resumes. If they are not removed or partially lifted on warm spring days, early budding is encouraged. One way to minimize this problem is to punch several holes near the top to allow better moderation of temperatures. This has a negligible effect on the efficiency of the cone.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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