



# Care of Modern Roses in Iowa

Modern roses, such as hybrid teas, grandifloras, and floribundas, are attractive additions to the home landscape. While roses are beautiful, they do require good care. Proper planting is critical. After planting, important cultural practices include watering, fertilizing, deadheading, weeding, pest control, and winter protection.

## Planting

Dormant, bare-root roses should be planted in early spring (late March to mid-April in Iowa). Container-grown roses can be planted from spring to mid-summer.

Begin by digging a hole large enough to accommodate the roots of the plant. In the northern United States, the bud union of hybrid tea, grandiflora, and floribunda roses should be planted two to four inches below the soil surface to prevent destruction of the plant from harsh winter weather. The bud union is denoted by a knob or crook in the stem.

Place the bare-root rose in the center of the hole, spread out its roots, then place soil in the hole, firming it around the roots. Water the plant thoroughly after planting.

Container-grown roses are planted in a similar manner. Carefully remove the rose from the pot without disturbing the soil ball. Place the rose in the hole. Fill the hole with soil, and water thoroughly.

## Watering

During dry weather, water roses about every 7 to 10 days. Water slowly but deeply. When watering roses, apply the water directly to the soil around the base of the plant. Avoid overhead watering. Wet foliage increases the risk of disease problems.

An excellent way to conserve soil moisture is by mulching. Suitable mulches include wood chips, shredded bark, and cocoa bean shells. Spread 2 to 4 inches of mulch around the base of each plant or over the entire bed.

## Fertilizing

Roses should be fertilized to encourage vigorous growth and continuous bloom. A general all-purpose fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, is recommended. This should be applied at a rate of one pound of fertilizer per 100 square feet or ¼ cup per plant. Fertilize three times a year:

- 1) in early spring after pruning,
- 2) during the first bloom, and
- 3) mid to late July.

To discourage late season growth, do not fertilize after July 31. Succulent, late season growth may not harden off properly before winter and may be subject to winter injury.

## Deadheading

Deadheading or the removal of faded flowers is done to encourage additional flower production on hybrid tea and other repeat-blooming roses. The deadheading procedure is slightly different for newly planted and established roses. During the first growing season, it is usually recommended that the spent flower be removed above the uppermost 3-leaflet leaf. Removal of a larger percentage of the rose foliage reduces the plant's ability to manufacture food and slows growth. When deadheading established roses, the stem may be cut back to a 5-leaflet leaf. Retain at least two 5-leaflet leaves on each shoot. Use sharp tools (hand shears or knife) to remove faded flowers. Cut about ¼ inch above an outward facing bud and leaf with the cut made parallel to the angle of the leaf.

## Weed and pest control

Hoing, hand pulling, and mulching are the most practical weed control measures for home gardeners. Small weeds are relatively easy to control by hoeing and hand pulling. Applying a mulch—such as bark, wood chips, or cocoa bean shells—around roses helps control weeds.



When confronted with insect and disease problems, correctly identify the pest and use appropriate control measures. One option is the use of pesticides. Apply insecticides only when the insects are present and causing significant damage to the roses.

Diseases, such as black spot, are often the biggest threat to roses. Fungicides often have to be applied on a regular basis from spring to late summer to control many foliar diseases.

When using pesticides, carefully read and follow directions on the product label.

### Winter protection

Iowa's winter weather can be harsh. Most hybrid tea, grandiflora, and floribunda roses grown in the state require winter protection. Exposure to low temperatures and rapid temperature changes can severely injure and sometimes kill unprotected roses.

An excellent way to protect modern roses is by hilling or mounding soil around the base of each plant. Begin by removing fallen leaves and other debris from around each plant. Removal of diseased plant debris will help reduce disease problems next season. Then loosely tie the canes together with twine to prevent the canes from being whipped by strong winds. Next, cover the bottom 8 to 12 inches of the rose canes with soil. Place additional material, such as straw or leaves, over the mound of soil. The straw or leaves can be held in place with chicken wire fencing or by placing a small amount of soil over the materials.

Prepare roses for winter after plants have been hardened by exposure to several nights of temperatures in the low to mid-twenties. Normally, this is in early November in northern Iowa, mid-November in central areas, and late November in southern counties.

### Spring pruning

The upper portions of hybrid tea, grandiflora, and floribunda roses typically die due to exposure to low winter temperatures and rapid temperature changes. When the winter protection is removed from these roses in early spring (late March to mid-April), gardeners should prune out the dead wood.

Identifying live and dead wood is easy. Live wood is green and has plump, healthy buds. When pruned, the center of the stem (pith) is white. Dead wood is brown and has no live buds. Its pith is brown or gray.

When pruning roses, make the cuts at least 1 inch below the dead, brown-colored areas on the canes. Make slanting cuts about ¼ inch above healthy, outward-facing buds, the slant being made in the same direction as the bud. Remove the entire cane if there is no sign of life.

Due to our harsh winter weather, hybrid tea, grandiflora, and floribunda roses often suffer a great deal of winter damage. Normally, the primary objective of rosarians in the upper Midwest is to remove all dead wood and save as much live tissue as possible. If roses suffer little winter damage because of a mild winter, prune the rose canes back to within 8 to 12 inches of the ground.

### For more information

Contact your local ISU Extension office or visit these websites:

<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/>  
[www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu)  
[www.reimangardens.iastate.edu](http://www.reimangardens.iastate.edu)

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