

Action in the Flower Garden

Distribute 08-16-2018

It is time to prepare your rose plants for the fall blooming period. The preparation usually involves some pruning, fertilization, and establishing a pest control spray program.

Fall pruning is less extensive than the spring version. Cut out any dead stems and open the middle of the plant by removing large stems growing inward rather than outward from the main branches. Stems that are growing over the sidewalk can be removed and the height of the plant can be reduced by up to one third.

Fertilizers specially formulated for roses can be used but slow release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 works well too. Spread an initial cup of the fertilizer on the drip line of the plant and add a half cup every three weeks until Thanksgiving.

Roses are favorite feeding sites for thrips and beetles. There are several systemic and contact insecticides from which to select. A long-time treatment that has been effective is spraying every week with a product with acephate as the active ingredient. Some organic options use spinosad as the active ingredient. Review the labels of the products available at your favorite nursery to select the one that suits your gardening philosophies the best.

The fungal disease black spot is a serious threat to most hybrid tea roses. Control it with a product with triforine as the active ingredient. Neem oil and sulfur products are also used to prevent black spot.

If you are growing old-fashioned or tough modern roses such as Belinda's Dream, Katy Road, Martha Gonzales, Knock Out, or Mrs. Dudley Cross, they are less susceptible to black spot and to the insects than your hybrid tea roses. You can generally get by without a spray program. Pruning is also less of an issue. Remove the dead stems and control size as you need to. Fertilizer and regular irrigation increase bloom performance but is less essential than with hybrid tea roses.

While you are preparing your roses for the fall bloom period, be alert to the Rose Rosette Virus. It is common in North Texas but isn't yet common in the San Antonio area. Recognize the disease if one or more of your roses show excessive thorniness, leaf distortions, dark red foliage, and witches' brooms instead of blooms. The disease is not subtle and will be obvious if you have it. There is no treatment other than to remove and discard infected plants being careful to collect all the foliage and mites on the plant. Rose Rosette Virus is spread by the mites from infected plants. For more information visit plantanswers.com.

Fall asters and mint marigold bloom for a short period in late fall but they make a spectacular show. The best way to prepare them is to prune them back and shape the mound every month until just before they bloom in November. The result is a mound covered with blue flowers (fall aster) or golden flowers (mint marigolds) that are the focal point of the landscape for the period they are blooming. In addition to the flowers, the two perennials attract large number of butterflies. Conduct your last pruning now and then let the mounds develop for the blooms. Deer do not eat mint marigold.

If you planted zinnias in the cut flower or butterfly garden in early spring, they may be declining now. Potentially, however you could have zinnia blooms going strong into December or until the first freeze arrives. There are several strategies to choose from. You can pull the spent plants and replant

Dreamland hybrids or another transplant variety. Another option is spread the seed from the brown flowers on the garden bed in the open areas where you removed the declining plants. Keep the soil moist and the seed will germinate within 5 or 6 days and be in bloom within a month.