

## ORGANIC ROSE CARE: A FEW SIMPLE STEPS

By Betsy Ginsburg

Some people think that “organic rose care” is a contradiction in terms. They are mistaken.

Organic rose care is, in fact, the simplest way to grow beautiful roses in a healthy environment.

Follow these guidelines for successful, sustainable rose growing:

- **Right Rose, Right Place:** Most roses need full sun—at least 6 hours per day—for optimal health and flower production. A few types, including hybrid musks and Gallicas, will flower well in very light shade, but generally roses like the same light conditions as tomatoes. Texas A&M University conducts rose trials for its “Earth-Kind” program and has compiled a list of extremely hardy roses that thrive in a wide variety of conditions with a minimum of intervention. Find the Earth-Kind list at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkindroses/cultivars/>
- **Air Circulation:** Give new roses enough room. Check the plant tag for the mature size of the specific variety and make sure to leave enough space for the full-grown specimen. This allows air to circulate around and through the rose canes (stems), deterring fungal diseases. Check roses in early spring for dead, weak or crossed branches that impede air flow. Remove them from the plant, wiping clipper blades between cuts with a cloth dipped in chlorine bleach.
- **Mulch Properly:** Mulch smothers weeds and conserves soil moisture. Surround each rose plant’s base with a two-foot circle of organic mulch, applied to a depth of two or three inches. Do not allow the mulch to touch the bases of the rose canes.
- **Ban the Bugs:** Integrated pest management (IPM), utilizing a variety of organic techniques to minimize pests, is the best way of dealing with insects (aphids, rose midge

and Japanese beetles) that feed on roses. The starting point for IPM is a well managed, organic garden that is home to birds and beneficial insects (like ladybugs) that will eat predatory insects. A strong spray of water from the hose will dislodge aphids and hand picking can take care of stray Japanese beetles. Organic sprays, like insecticidal soap, can be used in limited quantities when infestations persist. The IPM/organic approach increases in effectiveness over time as the garden ecosystem becomes healthier.

- **Disease:** Fungal diseases, including black spot and powdery mildew, flourish in hot, humid weather. Older yellow and yellow-blend roses are especially prone to black spot. Remove affected leaves as soon as they appear and treat roses regularly with a mixture of one tablespoon baking soda, one tablespoon oil and a few drops of liquid dish soap dissolved in a gallon of water and applied with a sprayer. Be sure to coat the undersides of leaves.
- **Food and Water:** Roses thrive on consistent moisture, but do not like to be waterlogged. Drip irrigation maximizes the amount of water that gets to rose roots and minimizes waste through evaporation. Use irrigation when rain amounts are less than one inch per week. Fertilize by applying fish emulsion, available at garden centers, once a month or at intervals recommended by the manufacturer.