

Roses for the Fourth of July!

Accomplished rose growers continue to have an abundance of bloom regardless of the calendar but perhaps most of us wait patiently for the cooler nights of September that usher in a livelier rose season that lasts until December. You may be interested to know that there is a climbing rose called 'Fourth of July', an appropriate name as it has sort of muddled red and white stripes. Although they may not be displaying a lot of charm in this heat, roses still require a modicum of attention.

Aside from being fed and watered, our roses need for us to study them with a critical eye to see what chores can wait and what needs to be done today or tomorrow or the day after tomorrow? Once upon a time roses were usually grafted, meaning that the root was of different parentage than the desirable above ground species. Occasionally those sturdy roots send up suckers that must be removed as soon as they appear. If not removed, they will take over, robbing your 'real' rose of nutrients and resulting in eventual death.

It helps to know where the bud union of a grafted rose is located so you know what is growing from above or below it. Those suckers coming from below must be cut off but those coming from above must be welcomed. I have a suckering rose that surprises me because I assumed a rugosa rose would have been sold on its own roots. The next cool day out it goes! It is easy to discern non-rugosa foliage as the leaves are not wrinkly or rugose: others take a closer comparison to the valued plant. The new growth emerging from root suckers will have a different shape and color than the foliage of the top graft.

Ah, July, and you don't even want to think about weeding, much less do it. Even well mulched plants will have a few stem hugging weeds that have to come out. If you have the once blooming old roses, you know they prefer the cool of spring and will react to heat with a dash of early fall color – black spot. Black spot is that fungal disease happy with high humidity and high temperature: what more can I say?

You know the "don'ts". Don't water in the evenings. Don't work around wet plants. Don't crowd roses when planting them. Don't over-fertilize them. Don't allow them to dry out. Curiously, there is nothing new about black spot. It was first recorded in 1815, half a century before the modern hybrid tea roses that are occasionally blamed for it were even developed.

Another oddity is the prevalence of black spot on yellow roses. One old rose, *Rosa foetida* is known as the 'typhoid Mary' of the rose world because of the proclivity toward black spot among her descendants. One way to minimize the problem is to prune a portion of woody growth.

We know fall is pruning time but for roses belonging to some families such as musk, species, or rugosa, you can lighten the heavy growth right now. One exception to summer thinning is youngsters – one or two year old plants. Even days when real work is uninviting you can feel as if you are doing something by deadheading. By cutting back in early summer you will encourage fall renewal.

Many rose growers consider pruning to be the best way to get rid of black spot. Removing the low to the ground foliage as well as low twiggy growth when the early blooms fade is good prevention. Spraying with an anti-desiccant such as 'wiltPruf' puts a protective layer on the foliage and spraying with sulfur is another old remedy. However, sulfur should not be applied when the temperature is over 85 degrees.

When fungicides are used, both sides of the leaves have to be reached. The sissy's solution is planting only those cultivars with a high resistance to black spot.

Naturally when a large number of any one plant is in fairly close proximity, the diseases and pests attracted to that species will be there in force. Planting different plant species that attract good bugs may be helpful in encouraging a healthy garden.

Any dianthus that repeats the colors of the roses is attractive planted with roses. Alyssum, even when it is not blooming, has a plump green cushion that distracts from the legginess of hybrid teas. Another pretty foliage plant is rue, whose blue/green foliage is a fine contrast to roses. Feathery purple fennel is supposedly replete with insect repellent qualities that may counteract the attraction roses hold for bad bugs. Lavender blue catmint is another favorite for planting with roses but it is hard to know whether its charm is therapy for the roses or the rose gardener.