

Magic Garden Roses

Hello again everybody and welcome to our 5th newsletter on growing roses. In the last newsletter I had mentioned that we would be doing this one on pruning so I have taken some pictures of the roses before and after with step by step pictures to show just how easy this task really is.

It is amazing how this rose pruning task can be so stressful to some people and it is no wonder when you hear or read books about angle cutting, opening up the centre and cutting to outward facing buds!

Well here is some good news, forget all that! None of this applies to roses and in a minute I will tell you why.... but first lets start by ignoring some of the old myths surrounding growing roses. It is really much easier to achieve great rose gardens with very little effort, and that's all we are after!

We get a bit tired of stories saying how hard roses are to grow. People would have you think that you need a degree in "rose surgery" to properly prune roses. As they say "it's not rocket science", just follow a few simple rules and remember roses are very forgiving and much tougher than most people think.

Let's put three of the most common myths under the microscope.

Myth1. Angle cutting.

In 90% of areas in Australia, you simply don't need to angle cut as we are living in a much warmer climate than most of Europe. This theory was taken from books that had been written for European conditions and for many years this was the only source of information for Australian gardeners.

Angle cutting developed from the idea that a rose stem cut flat across would result in any sap that bleed from the cut or water that remained on the surface being trapped. This is correct but the rest of the theory is misleading. It assumes that when the sap or water remains, it causes die back. This can only occur when you are regularly under a blanket of snow in winter (take note our friends in alpine areas) and then only in the softer water shoots. Even then, it's not quite as bad as you might think as only an inch or so at most is lost. This die back is not caused from disease but as result of any sap left over in softer ends freezing. Even then, I would still just get into it without fussing over angle cutting.

Myth 2. Opening up the centre when pruning.

This is probably one of the worst things you could do to a rose bush as this should only be applied to fruit trees and certainly not roses. If you cut away the centre of roses, you may be removing perfectly good water shoots. New water shoots have to stay, even if they shoot up the middle. Water shoots are the new life and future of the plant.

Further along in this newsletter I will show you which shoots should stay and which ones should go.

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Myth 3. Pruning to an outward facing bud.

As the old saying goes – “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink”. In rose terms – “You can prune a rose to an outward facing bud, but you can’t make it shoot there”.

If a rose is pruned in Winter and starts producing water shoots from the base in Spring all the sap flow will be in the water shoots with very little going to the smaller buds. Once the bigger water shoots have finished rapid growth and are up to size then all the small buds will start to take off.

You don’t have to try to and prune to outward facing buds.... it’s a waste of time. A rose will shoot were it wants to. In most cases, just a few centimetres further down from your cut there will be a bud that is facing inwards!

Now we have removed some of the unnecessary myths and complications lets look at doing some effective but simple rose pruning.

(Hopefully I have not offended too many of the older generation of rose growers...)



STEP 1. To the left you can see the rose plant before we start. A typical hybrid tea rose. Take note that you can still see last years pruning level at around knee height with all the new shoots that have shot from the last seasons prune.

STEP 2. cut all stems at about 40cm to create a uniform pruned height.



STEP 3. you can now look into the rose and get a clear picture of everything that has to be removed without the longer stems trying to fight you while your are pruning.

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STEP 4. the removal of unwanted dead wood and smaller branches within the plant. Keep in mind, as I said earlier, I am not removing these branches to open up the centre. It's just that these older stems just happen to be inside the centre .



STEP 5. note the new growth, it has been left for good reason. Having younger stems will ensure the best sap flow throughout the next season. Younger stems simply keep your roses performing at their peak as they can uptake water and nutrients a lot better. Leaving old woody stems slows production and also hosts fungus spores.



Figure 6 shows the end result. A nicely pruned rose that has all the dead wood and spindly branches taken out. Note all the young red shoots ready to produce, these are needed to support all the new shoots in spring.

All you need to do now is to add fertilizer and that's that job done for another year.

I should put in a good word for the guys at Terra Firma, we think they make the best rose fertilizer in Australia. This 4 in 1 is a blend of chicken manure, fish meal, seaweed extract and blood & bone. It is a pelletized product and is marketed as "Organic Life".

We use one good handful per plant right after pruning(now), again in the middle of December and finally in January or February.

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To the left a carpet rose all pruned up. Prune these to the size of a basketball and be sure to remove any old woody growth every year.



To the right a typical standard with pruning completed and support ties checked. Apply the same pruning method as you have been shown with the bushes.

I hope that this has been helpful to all those wanting to know how to prune more effectively. If anybody would like a hands on demonstration, you are welcome to come out and see us. Please note that we will be completely finished pruning by August 4th. We are also very happy to answer any e-mails if anybody has any further questions.

Just remember the main thing and that's "keep it simple". With a little effort your roses will reward you 10 times over.

We are now starting to wind up the bare rooted season. Roses will still be for bare rooted sale till the end of August and we still have plenty in stock to cover any late orders. There is still a great range and all roses are quality 2 year olds.

Thank you all once again for your support and we look forward to sending out our next newsletter in time to give few weeks notice before the need to start spraying. A basic preventative spray program is essential to keep those roses looking lush.

Here's one last myth busted – don't worry about disinfecting your secateurs, just make sure they are sharp and not rusty!

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