

ROSE TYPES & CARE

How many kinds of roses are there?

At last count, there were roughly 150 known species alone, and the garden hybrids of those number in the thousands. Every year, new varieties are tested, and some are eventually introduced. A great resource for viewing roses is the Washington Park rose garden. It is actually one of several rose test gardens around the nation, and is home to some of the newest roses and also some of the oldest. Keep in mind that since these roses are being evaluated, not all may actually continue on to the retail market. And not all varieties are still available. Much like cars, roses are often "discontinued" in favor of newer models. There has been a push for "antique" roses recently, but there has been a huge number of cultivars over the years and many have been lost or misidentified, making commercial reintroduction unlikely.

What is the difference in brands?

Many companies grow roses, and some put more money into marketing than others. Some larger companies hybridize their own varieties and have introduced some very popular and famous varieties. These brand-name companies are widely recognized by many people, but most of the other rose growers eventually grow that same product. We buy our roses from reputable sources that offer reasonable prices and high quality. For some of the newest varieties, we buy from the brand-name companies, but quality is always the same. All you need to do is pick a variety that you like, and rest assured that regardless of who it was grown by, it is an exceptional plant.

What are the main types of roses?

Hybrid Tea: This is the florist rose. They generally have longer stems with one large flower. Hybrid teas are probably the most popular type, and are pretty much what everyone imagines when they think of a rose. Beauty comes at a price though, as hybrid teas are a little bit more picky about pruning and some can be more disease prone.

Grandiflora: Big flowered like a Hybrid tea, but with multiple blooms per stem, and generally not as long-stemmed as a hybrid tea.

Floribunda: Floribundas have lots of smaller flowers per stem, but otherwise they grow much like a grandiflora.

Climbing: The myth here is that they will actually climb, which they don't. Climbing roses have very long stems which are ideal for training on arbors and trellises, but they have no means to actually grab onto something by themselves. Most climbing roses only bloom one to two times per year, as compared to the previous three types, which usually bloom perpetually. Flowers are generally smaller than a hybrid tea or grandiflora, but they make up for that in sheer numbers.

English: English roses have had a revival the past few years as new varieties have been developed and the David Austin series has been widely produced and marketed. They have large double flowers that are rich in fragrance. Unfortunately, the rumor that they are tough and disease resistant is far from the truth.

Rugosa: These spiny little shrubs make a great hedge for that "get out of my yard" look. This is the prickliest rose you could imagine, but it is also one of the toughest. It is generally covered with masses of fairly large single (or slightly smaller double) flowers. The flowers will give way to massive red or orange rose "hips" (fruit) that are highly ornamental and are used for many medicinal tonics and teas. They will also get a striking orange to red fall foliage color. A remarkable plant, and very recommended for many situations, both friendly and non-friendly.

Miniature: They look cute in the decorative pots at the supermarket, but they do not usually stay six inches tall. Many of the miniature roses can reach over a foot tall over time, but the flowers and foliage are still very small. A lot of the super dwarf varieties that you can buy are not sufficiently winter hardy to be of any landscape value, but we carry some of the "larger minis" that stay under a foot or so and can be successfully planted outdoors.

Trees: Rose trees are accomplished by grafting, and will have a graft union right below where the head starts to form. These are the same as the above varieties, but perched a little bit higher. The graft union can be somewhat cold sensitive, so it is a good idea to wrap the trees in colder winters for optimum growth.

Shrub: Everything else gets thrown in this category. Groundcovers, wild roses, and the like are all distinct, but are too few in number to get their own categories.

How should I plant my roses?

The planting site is one of the most crucial elements in successful rose growing. Roses need full sun! Some of the shrub roses aren't as picky about this, but a successful rose garden starts with a sunny spot. Shade causes long, sprawling, floppy growth and invites disease. The next element is soil. To start with, drainage is a must. Roses despise wet feet, and aren't terribly fond of heavy clay. Roses are most successful in raised beds, as raised beds drain exceptionally well and tend to have better temperature properties than regular flat soil. The better the soil, the better the roses. If you can bring in new soil, like a sandy loam or other soil mix, you should consider doing it. Whatever soil you use should be high in organic material, fast draining, and close to a neutral pH. Clay can be used, but you must amend it with a lot of organic material. Lime generally needs to be added to counteract the acidity of our native soils. Roses love rich soil, so be sure to add quite a bit of organic material. One of the best things we have found is composted steer manure, or something comparable. Mushroom compost doesn't last long enough, but a heavier planting compost could be used. Try not to use a lot of bark around roses, it can have somewhat adverse effects over time.

When you are ready to plant, pick a good planting site and fix it up as mentioned above. Standard planting procedures apply, but there are a few things to keep in mind. It is beneficial to add a cup of lime when planting, as this will correct pH around the plant. Also, all hybrid roses will have a graft union towards the base of the plant, right above where the roots start to form. This union is easily recognized, it is generally swollen and looks like a knot. This union must remain above the soil level! This also includes any mulch that you put down: keep the graft union clear. Burying this will give you massive headaches and heartbreaks in the near future. You may also want to consider adding some mycorrhiza when you plant for added health.

Maintenance

The dreaded "M" word. Watering and fertilizing is similar to other plants, but roses tend to like more of each. Fertilizer should be applied at regular intervals. Liquid fertilizer is acceptable, but it should be balanced out with a heftier granular fertilizer every once in a while. The best fertilizers have a higher rate of phosphorous and potassium, and a lower nitrogen rate. Mulch helps considerably in keeping soil temperatures higher and retaining moisture, and can be very beneficial. You can save yourself a lot of trouble by monitoring regularly for pests and diseases, so that problems can be fixed before they become a full blown epidemic. One of the most important elements is pruning. Learn the secret to rose pruning, and you will be a master in the art of growing roses. By keeping on top of these things and planting in a proper area, there is absolutely no reason why your roses won't thrive.

Problems

There is no perfect rose, although some people may claim that they have discovered one. The whole rose family has similar afflictions, and it helps to recognize these problems so that the proper treatment can be used. Yes, there will be one problem or another at some point, but if you know what to look for, most problems are simple to fix. Here are a few of the most common -

- Black Spot: Just like it sounds, black spot is a fungus (or bacteria) that causes black blotches on the leaves. Often, leaves with heavy spotting turn yellowish also. Any leaf with black spot will eventually fall off. General treatment involves a disease control chemical. Black spot can also be prevented through dormant spray, cleanup of fallen leaves, proper pruning, and proper watering.
- Rust: Again, just like it sounds. Rust is characterized by bright yellow-orange spots on the leaf. True rust will carry all the way through the leaf and be evident on the leaf underside as well. The treatment is the same as for black spot.
- Powdery mildew: This looks like a powdery white dust on the leaf, often accompanied by leaf distortion (curling, etc.). One of the best ways to prevent this is to fertilize with a good fertilizer that is not super heavy on nitrogen. Lots of nitrogen causes weak growth which is an easy target for mildew. Control is the same as black spot.
- Aphids: Aphids love roses. You will generally see them in massive colonies on the flower buds or leaves. Afflicted parts of the plant will be severely contorted and/or covered with a sticky clear substance. Often you can just hose them off or let some ladybugs loose, but severe infestations may require chemical control measures.
- Whitefly: The symptoms and control are similar to aphids, but whiteflies usually look like miniature pieces of tissue lint on the foliage. Brushing the foliage will send a flurry of tiny flying bugs all over. The treatment is the same as for aphids, although whiteflies are not likely to be washed off with a hose.
- Some lesser insects: Aphids and whitefly are the two primary pests, but other offenders can include leafhoppers (look like mini grasshoppers), leaf rollers (the leaf rolls up with an unpleasant little bug inside), and various caterpillars that can munch on various parts of the plant. Control of these can vary, so you may want to ask about them to get the most accurate information.