

Rose Pruning 101

(from <https://extension.illinois.edu/roses/prune.cfm>)

General Suggestions

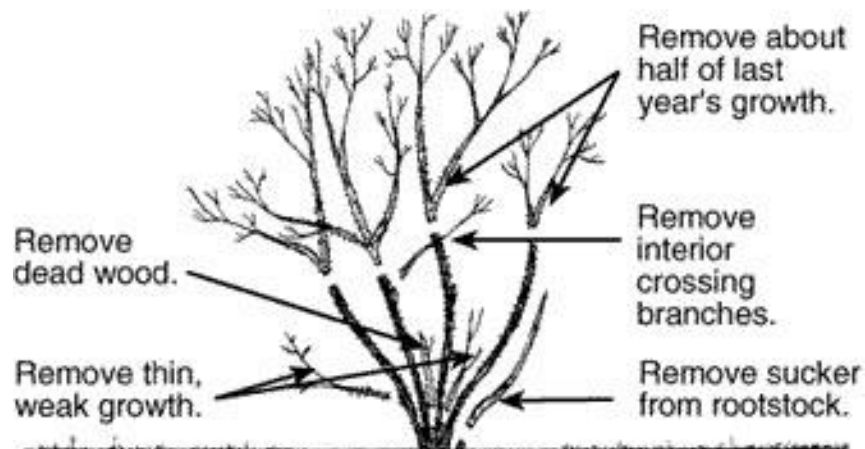
The class of rose and the time of year it blooms influence the type and amount of pruning. General pruning principles apply to all roses, but there are differences between classes. The closer one gets to species roses the less severe the pruning. Hybrid teas have the distinction of requiring the most severe pruning for optimum bloom and plant health.

Pruning should also be looked at as applying a few common sense principles to accomplish several tasks.

These tasks are:

- to remove dead, damaged, or diseased wood
- increase air circulation; keep the shrub from becoming a tangled mess
- shape the plant
- encourage the growth of flowering wood

The majority of pruning is done in the spring. Many rose growers suggest waiting until the forsythias start to bloom as a good signal for the pruning season to begin.



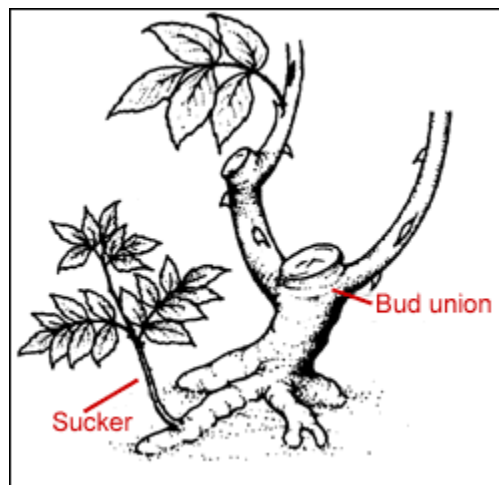
Dead heading pruning technique

The goal of spring pruning is to produce an open centered plant. This allows air and light to penetrate easily.

(from <https://extension.illinois.edu/roses/prune.cfm>)

Basic pruning fundamentals that apply to all roses include:

- Use clean, sharp equipment.
- Cut at a 45-degree angle about 1/4 inch above outward-facing bud. The cut should slant away from the bud.
- Entirely remove all dead or dying canes. These can be identified as canes that are shriveled, dark brown, or black.
- If cane borers are a problem, it is suggested to seal the ends of the cuts to prevent the entry of cane borers. White glue works well.
- Remove all thin, weak canes that are smaller than a pencil in diameter.
- If roses are grafted and there is sucker growth, remove it. The best way is to dig down to the root where the sucker is originating and tear it off where it emerges. Cutting suckers off only encourages regrowth of several suckers where there once was one.



Location of Suckers



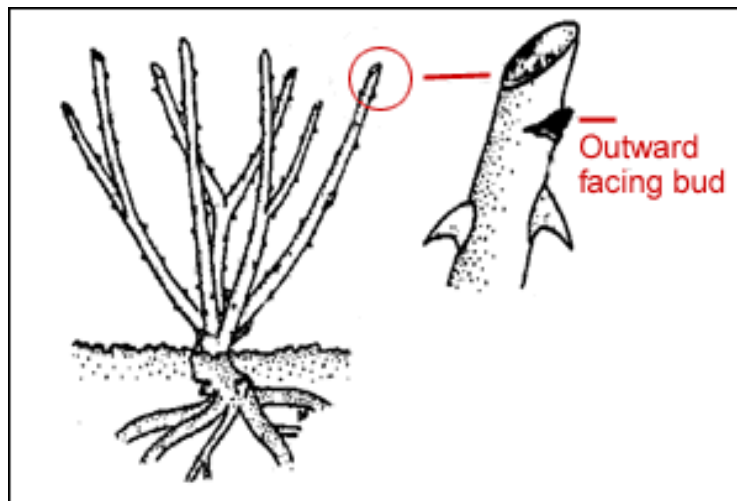
Modern Ever-Blooming Roses

Roses like hybrid teas, grandifloras, floribundas, and miniatures produce the best flowers on new or current season's wood.

To ensure this type of wood, these roses are pruned very hard in early spring. This usually means removing about one-half to two-thirds of the plant's height and reducing the number of canes.

Suggested pruning sequence:

- Remove all dead canes; cut them off at the base or point of discoloration.
- Remove small, weak canes.
- Leave 3 to 5 healthy, stout canes evenly spaced around the plant.
- Cut these canes back, leaving 3 to 5 outward-facing buds.



Modern Shrub Roses

Repeat-flowering shrub roses bear flowers on mature stems that are not old and woody. Severe pruning of these roses would result in reduced flower production. In their first two or three seasons in the garden, shrub roses can be left unpruned. Wait to see what shape develops and then try to prune so that the shape is maintained. Many modern shrub roses are pruned by a method called the "one-third" method.

Suggested pruning sequence:

- In the spring, remove one-third of the very oldest canes. This helps keep the plant from becoming an overgrown thicket of poor-flowering canes.
- Replace these canes by identifying about one-third of the very youngest canes that grew the previous season.
- Remove the remaining canes.



The result of this one-third method is that you are continually renewing the rose while at the same time keeping enough mature wood to ensure a good supply of flower-producing wood.

Old Garden Roses

These roses are pruned much like modern shrub roses with some important considerations based on class. Old once-blooming roses such as Alba, Gallica, Centifolia, Damasks, and Mosses produce flowers on old wood, all pruning should be delayed until after flowering. Then, you do as little or as much pruning as is required to maintain the plant. Thinning and removing old wood is encouraged. These roses may not need annual pruning if there is no dead or damaged wood present.

Repeat-flowering old garden roses such as Bourbons, Hybrid Perpetuals, and Portlands bloom on both new and old wood. These can be pruned before they flower and pruned harder without fear of losing blooms.

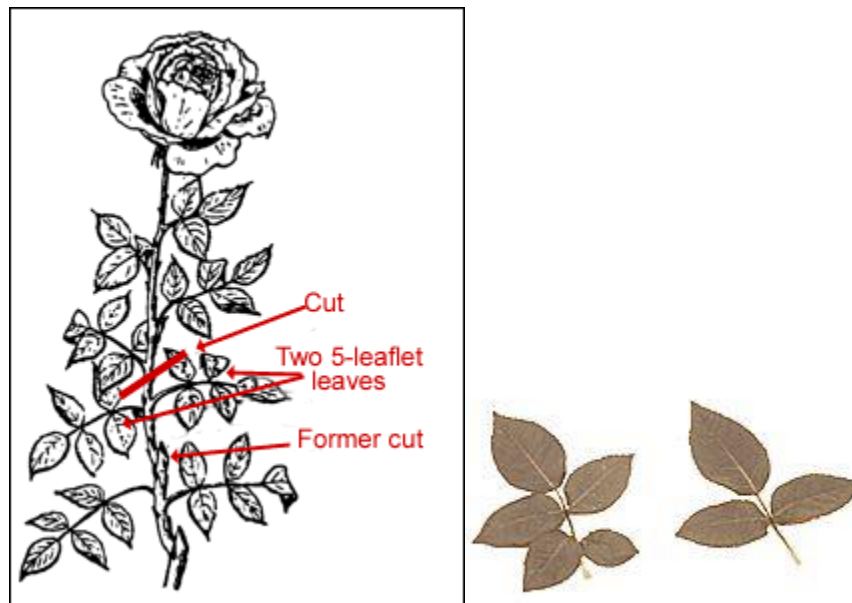
Climbers and Ramblers

Climbers and ramblers may need a few seasons in the garden before pruning is necessary. In many cases, pruning is limited to removing winter-damaged wood. Pruning is similar for both classes. The difference is in the timing. Because ramblers are once-blooming, they are pruned right after flowering in early summer. Because climbers are repeat bloomers, they are pruned in early spring. Reducing the side shoots or laterals to 3-6 inches stimulates flower production, resulting in more blooms. Training canes to grow more horizontally encourages the growth of bloom producing side shoots.



Dead-Heading

Dead-heading is the removal of faded flowers before they can develop seed. Dead-heading is a form of summer or day-to-day pruning. The standard recommendation is to cut the flower stem back to an outward-facing bud above a five-leaflet or seven-leaflet leaf.



Dead Heading Pruning Technique

This "rule" applies best to plants that are vigorous. If the plant is weak or small, you may not want to cut off as much material. Each time you remove this much wood you are removing a lot of the food-making ability of the plant. This method works well for most recurrent-blooming types of roses. With rugosa and other shrub roses where hips are a part of the display, you may not want to prune off the old flowers. In this case, simply clean the spent blooms away with your hand, leaving the hips. Flowers should not be cut after October 1 to allow the plant to begin hardening off for the winter. Dead-heading is also a good way to lessen the likelihood of diseases such as botrytis from becoming a problem.

10 Principles of Rose Pruning

By Robert B. Martin, Jr.

Master Rosarian

Here are ten simple principles that provide guidance on pruning the large roses--Hybrid Teas and Grandifloras. With some modification, mentioned at the close, the principles also apply to pruning Floribundas and Miniatures.

1. Plan Your Pruning From the Ground Up.

Most rose growers start the pruning process from the top, standing over their roses and nibbling away with pruning shears as if they were barbers giving their roses a trim. This wastes valuable time; it can also be damaging. The purpose of pruning is to select the strong, healthy canes that will support the new year's growth. The stuff at the top is last year's history. Get down on your knees (sit down if it's more comfortable) and look at the bud union and the canes that come from it. Think about new growth and turn to rule number.

2. If It's Too Old To Cut It, Cut It.

Identify the newest canes. They are the ones that are the greenest. Then identify any older canes. (If your bush is young--say two to three years old--you may not have much in the way of older canes.) Like people, they are the ones that are craggy and gray. This is not the time for nostalgia. The old gray ones usually have weak spindly growth on them and are in the way of brand new canes that are now only a gleam in the bud union's dormant eyes. Use your loppers or handy pruning saw and cut the old buzzards off flush with the bud union. When this is accomplished, turn to rule number 3:

3. If It's In the Way, Cut It Away.

New growth needs room and the ideal plant grows out from the center. Identify any canes that cross directly over the center and cut them off with your loppers or pruning saw flush with the bud union or, as is more generally the case, flush with the cane from which they have decided to grow in the wrong direction. Also, identify any canes that are seriously crowding each other. If they are not too close you can wedge them apart with a piece of stem cut from the plant. If not, cut them out with your loppers or pruning saw, again flush with the bud union or the cane from which they are growing. The remaining canes are now your bush and are ready to be pruned back--leading to the next rule:

4. The Height Is As Simple As 1-2-3.

The relative merits of severe versus light rose pruning are debated at length in the rose literature. Most proponents of severe pruning are from areas that require winter protection for their roses. Since the cold is going to kill back long rose canes anyway this makes sense. The proponents of very light pruning either don't know what they are doing, are too faint-hearted, or have an inordinate love of bushy foliage and small blooms on short stems. In my Southern California climate, neither approach makes sense. Mentally divide the cane into three equal parts and prepare to remove the top one-third. Before you do, however, proceed to rule number 5:

5. For All You Do, This Bud's For You.

If you are unusually lucky, exactly 2/3rds of the way up the rose cane (or 1/3rd down depending on whether you have now stood up) will be an outward facing bud eye. Bud eyes are found at the intersection of the cane and a leaflet of five. They will also develop from what looks like an expanded band on the cane. Sometimes they are obvious; other times less so. There should be several and the generally preferred one faces out. But it is not necessary to be slavish to the outside eye rule. (Where the canes come out at a 45 degree or greater angle, a cut to the outside facing eye can often result in a horizontally spreading rose bush with canes that fall of their own weight. This is particularly true of rose bushes that tend to naturally grow horizontally. A cut to an inner facing eye in such cases will usually produce a cane that goes straight up, the best way for roses to grow.) What if there are no properly placed bud eyes? Find one and work with what you've got. If you haven't got any, double check your eyesight and if there are really no eyes of promise conclude that God didn't intend the cane to live anyway. This brings us to a very important and seemingly heartless rule:

6. When In Doubt, Cut It Out.

Many rose growers are somewhat squeamish about pruning roses, for fear they will harm a plant that produces such beautiful and delicate rose blooms. Don't let the blooms fool you--a rose bush is one tough cookie. How else could the rose have survived without the loving care of rosarians for hundreds of millions of years? The rose bush will take care of itself, so if you're puzzling about whether to leave that little stem that, although unpromising, might do something--cut it off. In this vein, we come to rule number 7:

7. If It Isn't Big Enough to Seal, It Doesn't Belong There.

Most instructional pieces on rose pruning advise you to seal cuts on stems larger than a pencil. Why, you may ask, should you consider leaving stems smaller than a pencil? A stem growing from another cane will never be larger than its source. Pencil-thick rose stems produce matchstick-thick stems that produce pin-thick stems that produce roses that only the thick-headed could love. Forget also the common instructions about sealing with shellac (who can find shellac anymore?) or nail polish or God forbid, the black, oily spray-on sealing goop that invariably gets sprayed on the bud eye, forever sealing it from growth. A drop of Elmer's or any white glue is fast and easy. Ignore those who claim you needn't seal in the winter because the cane borers are not active. This may be true where it's below freezing and the borers are all dead, but having personally lost more canes to borers than I care to disclose, I can guarantee you that if there is one borer in your neighborhood that is still alive, it'll drill a hole right into the end of your cane and deposit a creature that, if disregarded, will eat its way all the way to the bud union. Don't give the sucker an even break. And while we're talking about giving bugs a break, consider the next rule:

8. Leave No Leaves.

Strip all the remaining leaves on the rose bush. They too are last year's history. You want new leaves that can get a good start without catching fungus infections or facing attack from the bugs hanging around the old leaves. After this, your rosebush should be looking pretty bare and you can wrap up your work with a little advice that sounds like it came from Mom:

9. Don't Forget To Brush!

Take a wire brush and brush off that scaly woody stuff on the bud union at the base of the rose bush. Try not to brush off any promising bud eyes while you're at it. Rose lore says this exercise will stimulate and provide room for basal breaks--new canes from the bud union. Whether this is really true has not exactly been proven, but it seems like a good idea and maybe the bush you just butchered will consider it a pat on the head and recognize that you still love it. But before you get too dreamy, you can turn to the last rule, which coincidentally also sounds like a word from Mom:

10. Clean Up After Yourself.

Gather up all the canes, stems, leaves and miscellaneous stuff you've generated, bag it up and throw it away. While you're at it, yank the weeds from around the bush and get rid of all the dead leaves and dried up old petals lying around. All of last year's fungus and insect problems are lying around in this stuff waiting for the new blooms. And don't bother to compost it. Rose canes don't decompose well and the spores, eggs and other things in the mess seem to survive composting efforts quite well. Finally, lay down some new mulch to make things look real neat. Your Mom will be proud of you and will love the roses that bloom in the spring, tra la.

The above rules also generally apply to floribunda roses, however the trick here is to prune more lightly and to not worry about leaving thin stems. The rules also generally work on Miniature roses; however, since they are usually growing on their own roots, you can leave a lot more canes. In both cases, careful pruning can get rather tedious so some growers simply prune off the top third of the rose bush with hedge shears like a shrub and get pretty good results.