

# ROSES IN YOUR SOUTH FLORIDA LANDSCAPE

prepared by John McLaughlin\* and Joe Garofalo\*

For many home owners a garden is not complete without a rose bed. However, these are plants that have gained a reputation for being difficult to grow in South Florida. Below is a check list for those considering the inclusion of roses in their South Florida landscape.

## WHERE IN THE LANDSCAPE?

There are two imperatives when considering where to install roses: the first is adequate exposure to sun (6 - 8 hours, preferably including morning), and the second is root competition. Roses are heavy feeders, so avoid competition for available nutrients with tree roots. Consider the future spread of roots if trees are not already fully grown. Plan ahead and envisage what other plants you wish to put in the yard. Roses do not thrive in a crowded landscape. Even if you only have a small patio, with adequate daily exposure to sun you could still grow 2 or 3 small roses in planters. For climbing roses you will need to install a suitable support (e.g., pillar or archway), or in some instances it may be possible to use an existing feature such as a chain link fence.

## PLANT SELECTION.

(a) *Own root or grafted?* In most instances only roses grafted onto a *Rosa x fortuniana* rootstock should be grown in Southeast Florida. In areas on limestone or where the soil is not too sandy, it is possible to grow Tea, China, Noisette and some Bourbon roses on their own roots. All of the modern roses, including hybrid teas, should be grafted. Unless you don't mind replanting every two years, avoid varieties on *R. multiflora* rootstock. Look for the name tag which should indicate that the rose is on the correct *R. fortuniana* rootstock.

(b) *Class of rose.* There are a large number of different classes of roses, however the most

extensively grown class worldwide is the Hybrid Tea. These come in a stunning range of colors, and some can do quite well in our tropical conditions if they are on the correct rootstock. They are, however, high maintenance roses, requiring routine spraying for disease control, regular application of fertilizer, and supplemental watering.

Rose classes that do particularly well in our sub-tropical climate include Chinas and Teas, plus some Noisettes and Bourbons (latter more disease prone). The so-called "Bermuda Mystery Roses" are also well adapted to conditions in Miami-Dade County. These five groups of roses are among those often referred to as "heirloom roses." More detailed information on these roses is available in a separate publication, "Old Roses for Miami-Dade County," available from the Miami-Dade Extension Office.

## PLANTING.

(a) *Time of year.* It is usual in South Florida to plant roses in late winter to early spring to allow the plants to become established before the heat and humidity of summer. It is advisable to avoid planting in the hottest and wettest months of the year.

(b) *Bare root or container grown.* If possible use containerized plants. Since mail-order plants are often shipped bare root, have the planting hole ready in advance, place the roots in water overnight, and plant the following day.

(c) *The planting hole and soil.* The hole should be 12 -18" deep, dish shaped and at least 3 -4' in width (larger for a substantial shrub rose). The planting hole can be lined with Canadian peat or well rotted compost, with the rose installed and backfilled with a rich organic free draining soil. Where sufficient top soil is present, this can be used if stones and rubble are first removed, and organic amendments such as

Canadian peat, compost, bone meal and dried blood are then added. Use a 1:1 mix of soil and peat and/or compost, plus a cup of bone meal and 3 cups of dried blood per planting. Alternatively, bagged rose soil is available, and should be mixed with top soil as directed on the bag.

In the absence of workable topsoil (e.g., limestone areas of south Miami-Dade) use a potting soil amended 2:1 with the above organic components. Tamp the soil down gently and water, then apply a 3" layer of organic mulch, leaving the area around the crown of the plant clear. The rose should be positioned at or slightly above the soil line. For bare root roses first spread the roots over a mound of soil so that the crown is level with the soil line, then continue as above. A slow release rose fertilizer can be sprinkled on the soil before mulching.

There are claims that soil previously used for roses inhibits growth by a process called allelopathy, especially with Teas, Chinas and Hybrid Teas. For this reason, many rose growers use fresh soil in areas where roses have previously grown.

(d) *Planters and raised beds.* Use a potting soil based mix as described above and mulch. Make sure that the soil is thoroughly mixed, and if dry moisten before adding it to the planter.

## ROUTINE CARE.

(a) *Water and Nutritional Requirements.* Under South Florida conditions, roses should receive 2-3 inch of water per week (including rainfall), more if planted in a raised bed. When required, water should be applied in early morning as a deep soaking 2-3 times per week, keeping as much as possible off the foliage. Irrigate early in the day so the foliage dries off quickly. Note that some of the large old Tea and China roses are far more drought resistant than most

modern roses, and once established can be watered every 7-10 days. Use a slow release rose fertilizer applied every 6-8 weeks, plus foliar-applied trace elements every 3 months. Mineral deficiencies are most likely on the highly alkaline limestone-based "soils" in south Miami-Dade, and applications of Mg or chelated Iron (FeEDDHA) may be necessary.

(b) *Pruning.* For those previously accustomed to growing roses in more northern latitudes, it will no longer be necessary to perform a major pruning for winter. Late Fall through Spring is when most roses, including Hybrid Teas, produce their best show of flowers in South Florida. Roses should be deadheaded (removal of spent blossoms), and regularly inspected for die-back of canes. Hybrid Teas, if necessary, can be pruned back by up to one third, whilst Tea and China roses will languish if pruned this severely. Pruning should be kept to a minimum and undertaken as needed, and it is best to avoid all but essential pruning during the summer.

As a first step, cut out all dead and infected wood, then cut back canes that cross one another and those producing blind (non-flowering) growth. Try to develop a bush with an open center, pruning back to an outward pointing full leaf or bud, and leaving no stubs. This latter point is most important in our climate, since disease can become established if stubs remain, leading to dieback of the pruned cane. Research has shown that using "wound-sealing" preparations does no good and may be harmful. If correctly pruned the cane will heal and new growth will be stimulated. Dieback due to canker can be a serious problem for some roses, particularly if they are stressed from lack of water and nutrients. Canker often progresses more rapidly down one side of a stem, so inspect carefully before cutting to ensure that all of the infected tissue is removed. Disinfect the shears after each cut with denatured alcohol.

**PESTS.**

Aphids, flower thrips, spider mites, weevils, big-footed and leaf-footed bugs and cane borers can sometimes be a nuisance. Note that roses with light colored blossoms are more attractive to flower thrips and that damaging populations are more likely to develop where such varieties are planted together. Varieties having sepals that cover the flower bud until it opens are less prone to attack from flower thrips. Cane borers are occasional pests, often attacking newly cut canes and found in the pith of the cane where they cause wilting and dieback. Any infested growth should be cut out as soon as it is noticed.

Blossom weevils and big-footed bugs, which attack new shoots, are occasional pests. Hand pick weevils and destroy them. Unless damage is severe, it is best to allow natural predators and parasites a chance to control any problem. Pesticides should be used sparingly because they can cause phytotoxicity, particularly those containing chlorpyrifos or diazinon. Contact your local Extension office for current control recommendations.

**DISEASES.**

In South Florida the two most prevalent diseases on roses are powdery mildew and blackspot. The former is favored by warm, dry weather (day temperatures of 80EF, and 40-70% relative humidity), such as occur in spring and occasionally late fall in South Florida. The disease is inhibited once the rainy season commences.

With increasing rainfall, however, blackspot can become a serious problem. Spread of the disease is favored by rain splashing spores from diseased leaves onto healthy leaves. Where foliage remains wet, with high humidity and a temperature of 75EF, fungal spores will germinate and infect the foliage within a day. Providing roses with sufficient room can help to lessen the spread of disease. Adequate spacing also permits better air circulation, promoting more rapid drying of plant surfaces, which is less conducive to

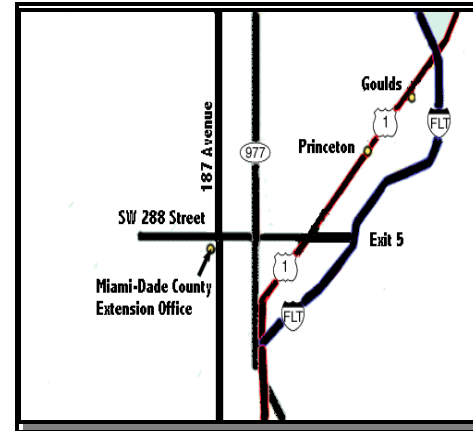
germination of infective spores. The severity of blackspot increases throughout the summer months, especially in stressed plants, and is worst in late August to September. A third less serious problem, Cercospora leaf spot, can be distinguished from blackspot by the spots that form, which have reddish purple borders and a grey center.

The most effective way to limit problems with these diseases, particularly blackspot, is to choose roses that are naturally resistant. The "old fashioned" roses (Chinas, Teas and Noisettes) are particularly resistant, whereas many modern roses (including Hybrid Teas) are far more susceptible. Control also is improved if plants receive adequate nutrients and water. With Hybrid Teas, you will need to spray weekly from May through October to control blackspot. Current recommendations are available from your local Extension office.

Two related problems, balling and petal blight, can also be concerns, particularly on roses with cabbage-like blossoms, including certain old fashioned roses such as Bourbons. The disease is at its worst during periods of cool, wet weather. Remove infected blossoms promptly.

**WEED MANAGEMENT.**

Maintaining an adequate depth of mulch should prevent weeds from becoming a problem. Any that do appear should be hand pulled as soon as possible, since weeds can spread rapidly in our climate. The prickles present on most roses make hand weeding difficult. It may be necessary to use herbicides. Pre- and post-emergent herbicide are available, as well as products which control grassy weeds.



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\*\*John McLaughlin is Program Assistant / Urban Horticulture. Joe Garofalo is Extension Agent / Commercial Ornamentals. Both are with Miami-Dade CES in Homestead.

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**In Writing**

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