

Autumn Cultural Notes

By Jim Cunningham

Mail order catalogues will start arriving for winter bare root planting selections. There is ample time to do planning, homework and careful selections. Catalogues can't speak for all the areas of Australia at one time. Colours and growth habits vary widely. Your best option is a little research.

Local gardens, whether public or private give you an opportunity to view size and sample fragrance and perhaps answer some questions. Local autumn rose shows will also benefit. Newer cultivars and old favourites can be viewed at leisure. Local rosarians in attendance will be happy to answer your questions. NSW Rose publications and the Australian Rose Annual "recommended roses" are other sources of information. You can cross reference your catalogue selections with the gardens you viewed and the rose show results in your area.

Colour is high on the buyer's list. Photos in sales oriented catalogues can be anything but realistic. Fragrance is a must for some people. If you are into "roses for noses" trust your own nose as proof. Disease resistance is something to consider closely. If you have no intentions of spraying as required, then look for bullet proof roses. If you are keen to start showing roses, exhibition form is paramount. Generally speaking the bloom is high centred with petals that open in a spiral fashion. Multiple bushes of the same cultivar are recommended.

After you determine which roses suit your needs, order as soon as possible. Hard to get roses and newer varieties sell out quickly. Specialist rose nurseries can answer any further queries you might have. Good luck with the roses of your choice.

Soil that is properly prepared will always give you good rewards when planting time arrives. Most rose hobbyists take rose bed construction very seriously. This is good garden practice. But as the years slip away, it's easy to forget that our roses are using all the good stuff we carefully provided during rose bed construction. Weather leaches out nutrients and organics break down.

The presence of earthworm activity is a good indication of a healthy rose bed soil. If earth worms are not evident chances are something is really wrong with the soil. New organic material should be added at least yearly to maintain a level where roses thrive. Whether you use good compost or manures organics, enrich the soil, keep the good bacteria and worms active and provide a happy environment for high quality roses to grow. A top dressing of organics twice a year is not a big order. Attention to good gardening basics is vital to the health of your roses, and gives you better pleasure.



Fungi spores will erupt as conditions become favourable and rosarians relax. The best solution is regular spraying, alternating types of fungicides. Diseases caused by fungi are much easier prevented than cured. A regular 14 day spray will keep the usual **black spot** and mildew under control. If infection does catch on increase the frequency, not the concentration of the solution.

Insects are not usually a problem during autumn. Aphids and thrips are rarely in plague proportions. Insecticides should be applied only when damaging insects are seen at work in the rose bed.

For optimal effectiveness of a pesticide, systemic or not, both sides of the foliage should be covered. Naturally spraying only the upper surface of the foliage is better than not spraying at all, but complete coverage is better and this is why. Many pests require a direct hit to be eliminated. They may not ingest enough of the pesticide to knock them out but they will be knocked down permanently by its contact effect. Fungal spores can also harbour under foliage and in crevices on stems.

Using a good sprayer and a little practice complete coverage of an established vigorous rose bush is easily completed in less than ten seconds. Pressure in the spray container should be sufficient to deliver a forceful cone of spray material. Start spraying at the base of the bush. Thrust the nozzle under the lower leaves and spray upward moving the nozzle from side to side up through the foliage to the top. Then do the same again from the top down through the foliage to the base. You don't have to saturate the bush to achieve satisfactory and complete coverage. As a guide, one litre of spray should cover six average size bushes.

Dead heading your roses in early autumn will produce a beautiful flush of flowers around Easter time. Simply prune back to a swollen bud, at a five or seven leaf leaflet, hand span length from the top of a lateral. This will produce blooms in around seven weeks' time.



As a general rule of thumb, the more petals that a rose bloom has the longer for a bud to develop into a flower and the fewer the number of repeat blooms throughout the growing season. The ever popular 'Peace' with over forty petals is an example. The roses with fewer petals, less than 20 petals tend to bloom faster and repeat more often.

In my garden 'Duet' is quick to repeat. Local growing conditions also play a role, making it difficult to predict accurately the bloom cycle. Try staggering your autumn trimming over a few days and record your result when the blooms arrive at Easter.

Fertilizing of the bushes should cease in early April. This is to encourage the bushes into dormancy and prepare harder stems for winter pruning. Liquid applications to potted roses are optional.