

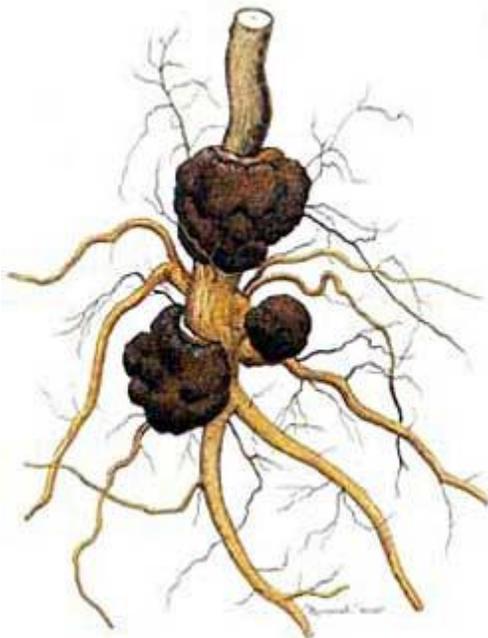
JANUARY ROSE GROWING

Written by HENRY SEILER, the 1st installment of 12 articles he wrote in 2008 for The Pensacola Rose Newsletter. Henry received the "Award of Merit" for Rose Growing Series from The American Rose Society for these 12 articles.

Well Gulf Coast Rosarians, the Christmas Season is over and here we are already entering the second week of the New Year. My, my, where did 2007 go? Actually, it wasn't a bad year considering we had no severe freezes and no hurricanes. Add a few productive spring showers and take away the October deluge and it would have been a bloody good year. But 2007 is behind us and we look forward to a new rose year which hopefully will be joyful and productive. December provided us with enough rainfall that we didn't have to water very much to prevent the roots from drying out. And the temperatures were moderate enough that we had some blooms on New Year's Day. But that all changed the very next evening when we experienced what the meteorologists call a severe freeze as the temperatures dipped to 23 degrees. But the temperature remained below the freezing mark for only 14 hours after which it warmed up and we are in a warming trend at this time. I haven't assessed the damage yet but I would assume that it is minimal if at all. One thing for sure is that it damaged the flower buds and the new growth to the point where we won't be timid about removing all foliage at pruning time. It is favorable to have cold temperatures induce dormancy provided it is sustained for a long enough period of time. Sustained winter dormancy is always followed by fabulous spring growth. What is not favorable though is to have the temperature warm up to 70 degrees immediately after a freeze. This is when **botrytis** really shows its' ugly face. **Botrytis** was my major culprit in December followed by **blackspot** and **spider mites**. Even though it is difficult to continue our spraying schedule throughout the winter it is to our benefit that we do so. This is when botrytis and blackspot cause damage to mature canes which contributes to the **dieback** that is often experienced at pruning time. Botrytis is also one of the varieties of fungus that causes stem **canker** sometimes seen after cold wet winters. At this time of year it is safe to combine two or three different fungicides or double the strength of your fungicide without damaging the bushes. It is also good to use a sticking agent with your spray. Some rosarians apply a **dormant spray**. Dormant sprays consist of those containing **copper, sulfur**, or both: **Bordeaux mixture** (copper hydroxide), **basic copper sulfate** (50%), **wettable sulfur** or **lime sulfur**. I use my two regular fungicides but also like to add an additional one that specifically targets botrytis. But getting psyched up to spray at this time of year is most difficult.

This is a good time to prepare new beds for February and March planting. It is also a good time to rework old beds. After a few years the soil in rose beds tends to pack. Nitrogen fertilizers contain large amounts of salt. When the salt accumulates the soil

becomes tighter and tighter, closing in on little air holes causing roots to suffocate. In January and February when the bushes are semi-dormant and in low gear they can be dug up, the soil reworked, and then replanted. You may just want to transplant a few bushes that have declined over the years. Sometimes transplanting a declining bush from one location to another will rejuvenate it and give it a new lease on life. Prepare the new hole as if planting a new bush. Be sure to stake the bush but don't prune until regular pruning time. Those bushes which are totally nonproductive and just taking up space and utilizing valuable resources should be discarded and replaced. Those bushes were at one time referred to as "dogs" and their removal is still referred to as "**shovel pruning**". When transplanting and shovel pruning bushes, check the roots and bud union for **crown gall**. These are irregular masses of growth caused by rapid, uncontrolled proliferation of the plant tissue. These galls can occur on the roots or stem usually at or just below the soil surface near the bud union. In many cases it is crown gall that accounts for the nonproductive growth. It is caused by the bacterium *Agrobacterium tumerfaciens*. Even though crown gall has been diagnosed in manicured



rose beds it is usually associated with poor soil and low beds with poor drainage. Many rosarians discard badly galled bushes along with much of the surrounding soil. It does spread. If the gall is isolated to one or two roots just cut the roots two or three inches above the gall. If it is associated with the stem and the bush is worth keeping you can attempt to do some surgery. Using a sharp knife cut the gall out and then treat the wound with bleach.

January is also the month to begin "**operation cleanup**" if not already started in December. Remove weeds and treat with pre-emergent granules like **Ronstar** or **Snapshot**. Remove diseased foliage, dead canes, and spindly growth.

Hold back on major pruning until Valentine's Day. And speaking of major pruning, this is the time to take inventory of your pruning equipment. Clean and sharpen shears and saws. You may want to invest in a new pair of **Felco** pruning shears (go for the best) and a new pair of gloves.

Some other January chores include applying **lime** and **gypsum** if you haven't already done so in December. Have your pH tested. A **pH meter** makes a nice late Christmas gift or an early Valentines gift.

Install an irrigation system. There are many types to consider. Talk to the other members that have them. Try rooting some cuttings. Roses root well with minimum effort in January and February.

If you have not already done so, try to determine what new varieties you wish to plant in your garden. Consult your rose catalogues for pictures and descriptions. If you have The American Rose Society's "**Handbook for Selecting Roses**", check the ratings. If you are not sure about which roses do best in the Pensacola area, check with the consulting rosarians. We have consulting rosarians to advise you. Some varieties look great in the catalogues, but don't do well in our area. If you intend to order bare root roses through catalogues, do so as early as possible. Just specify the date you wish to receive them. If you intend to purchase potted roses from local nurseries, find out when they will be arriving so you could have first pick in selecting the largest, healthiest plants. The ones that do best in our area are those grafted on **fortuniana** rootstock. In past years Mr. Jim Mills has delivered roses to Pensacola in March and October. He has many of the new, hard to get varieties.

The first week in February is the best time for planting bare root roses in our area. In selecting the bed site, remember that roses are sun lovers. They should receive at least six to eight hours of sun a day, preferably the morning sun. But don't be discouraged if your roses receive only four or five hours a day, even if it has to be in the afternoon. Try to select an area that is relatively free from roots of other shrubs and trees. Roses are heavy feeders and dislike competition from the roots of other plants. Rose beds should be elevated to allow for good drainage. Roses love water but resent "wet feet".

There are many recommendations concerning soil preparation before planting new roses. I find that most of them follow the same basic formula with only minor modifications. Most of them are satisfactory. However, I will give you my own personal recipe. Since most people don't get their soil analyzed before planting, I will assume that you are starting with sandy soil, which is relatively depleted of nutrients and with a low pH.

For each bush planted, a hole should be dug around 12 to 18" deep and about 24 – 30" wide. The lower portion of the soil should be mostly sand. Remove some of the lower portion to make room for the recipe. The following is my recipe which I mix with the upper 8 to 12 inches of soil: 10 lbs. of cow manure; 2 qts. of alfalfa meal; 1 qt. of cottonseed meal or soybean meal; 2 qts. of milorganite; 1 qt. of fish meal or kelp meal; 1 cup of perk (minor trace elements); 1 qt. of gypsum; 2 cups of lime (dolomite); 2 cups of bone meal; 1 cu. ft. of perlite; 2 cu. ft. of soil conditioner; 1 cu. ft. of sphagnum peat moss; 1 cup of superphosphate; and 1 cup of Osmocote slow release.

The above concoction should be mixed thoroughly and left to age for a few weeks.

If your bush is bare root, it should be soaked for about 24 hours before planting. I advise soaking the whole thing in plain water. If you receive bare root roses and are not ready to plant, they may remain in the package for one or two days so long as they are moist, or wrap them in wet newspaper and store in a cool, dark place. If planting has to be delayed for a longer period of time, it is better to pot your bare root roses in three to five gallon containers using a prepared potting soil until ready to plant.

Before planting your bare root rose examine the bush and remove any damaged roots and canes with pruning shears.

When ready to plant, make a soil cone in the middle of the hole and place the bush on top spreading the roots around it. Make sure that the bud union is about two to three inches above the soil level. Gradually cover the roots with soil and add water as you continue to fill the hole. Press the soil with your hands, water, and press again, then water again. Then mound plain soil up around the bush to about one inch from the tips of the stems. Gradually remove the soil as the buds break dormancy in the spring. Be sure to keep newly planted roses moist at all times. Never allow them to dry out. All of this may sound time consuming and expensive, but your Queens deserve it! And they will reward you. **Happy Rose Growing in January.**