

SEPTEMBER ROSE GROWING

*Written by **HENRY SEILER**, the 9th 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, I don't know about you but I'm ready for fall. August is always brutal to both roses and rosarians and this year was no exception. The high heat index made working conditions difficult, and the lack of sufficient rain combined with above average temperatures put our roses under tremendous stress to the point where some bushes began to lose vigor and resistance to diseases. The high humidity in the evenings and nights became inviting to black spot, which found our heat stressed roses to be easy targets. Some bushes were severely infected and lost much of their foliage. Even with tropical storm Fay dumping buckets of rain all around us, we barely received one and a half inches, and rainfall in Pensacola for the month of August was only 4.68 inches, which is about 2 inches below normal. We are at present about 8 inches below normal for the year. And the mighty Gustav that battered our bushes the entire day of Labor Day didn't deposit very much rain. Hope your bushes were staked and tied. We were fortunate that Gustav didn't curve in our direction. We'll have to wait and see what Hanna and Ike have planned.

We usually think of **September** as that time of year when a rosarian's fancy turns to thoughts of cooler weather and a pleasant rose growing environment. It would be nice if at midnight on August 31st, we could turn off the humidity switch and this hot muggy weather would automatically end, and cooler, dryer weather, the type we like to associate with September, would automatically click in. But, with all that warm, moist Gulf air sitting right behind us, it takes a while before the jet stream can move the cool fronts this far south. As most of us know, fall cool down is a slow process here on the Gulf Coast. But, this **is** September, and in September, our job is to gradually bring our roses out of the **summer doldrums** and get them ready for their “**Fall Fling**” when they will again produce quality blooms as they did in the spring. As the weather begins to cool (it will cool, believe me), the bushes will gain strength and begin to exert more vigorous growth. The drop in the night temperatures is the **trigger mechanism** that sets things off. So, it is the duty of the September rosarian to encourage this new spurt of growth. If you kept your bushes well watered through the harsh, dry summer they should have survived, although some may show minimal decline. Now, if you were fortunate enough to keep them free from **blackspot** and **spider mites**, you should be going into September with a good amount of foliage and relatively healthy bushes. In any case, ready or not, it is time for the **Fall Cutback**, better known as “**Fall Grooming**”. In order to encourage new, strong fall growth, we prune our bushes more

heavily than when we were deadheading during the spring and summer. Last month we were advocating cutting shorter stems in order to retain foliage. But, **DO NOT butcher your bushes**. Fall pruning should not be nearly as severe as spring pruning in February although some aspects are similar. **Fall grooming**, as we like to refer to it, consists of the following: Cut out all dead and diseased canes and remove all spindly, twiggy and nonproductive growth. Open up the center of the bush for good air circulation. Then cut the spent blooms back to the second or third five-leaflet leaf rather than the first as is usually recommended. A rule of thumb is to cut the tall canes to a point of about ½ inch diameter or about the size of a pencil. Prune heavier on the taller bushes but go easier on the shorter ones. There's no need to cut all canes to the same length as we do in February. On the exhibition Hybrid Tea's you may want to prune a little harder on two or three of the canes. I remove at least 1/3 of the growth from my hybrid teas and grandifloras. Trim Floribundas and climbers lightly and remove about 1/3 of the growth from the minis. If you are going to show roses at the Fair on October 15th and October 21st or at one of the three out of town rose shows you may want to follow a certain schedule to give yourself a better chance of having blooms for those occasions. Unlike the spring when it is extremely difficult to predict the number of days it takes a rose to bloom once it has been pruned, the FALL bloom cycle is largely predictable. The problem is that each variety is different and you would have to keep a log on a certain variety for two or three years to determine the exact number of days in its bloom cycle. But we can use some guidelines. It takes an average of six weeks from cut to bloom. Multi-petaled varieties take more time and those with fewer petals take less time. If your roses are blooming and you can count the petals you may want to use these guidelines. Varieties with 44 to 60 plus petals take from 49 to 52 days. Varieties with 35 to 43 petals take 42 to 48 days. And varieties with 25 to 34 petals take from 38 to 41 days. But, this is not an exact science and just being lucky may get you your best bloom at the most perfect time. Most serious exhibitors, the so-called **hardware hunters**, grow several bushes of each exhibition variety and they **stagger prune** over a two-week period. This pretty well insures them that they will have at least one specimen of each variety to exhibit. Whether we follow the pruning guidelines or not, we should strive to have them all pruned by the middle of September.

The last aspect of **fall grooming** is **disbudding**. This is similar to what we did in the spring. Most Hybrid Teas and grandifloras can support no more than two or three quality blooms per cane. So, when the bud eyes begin to grow a couple of weeks after pruning rub out or pinch off all except the best two or three. This funnels the energy of the cane into a select few strong stems rather than into several weaker ones. As the bud eyes grow and mature it is the nature of most varieties to produce multiple flower buds at the tip. Using your fingers, rub out all except the strongest one, which is usually the central bud. This is referred to as "**finger pruning**" and results in "one bloom per stem". On the other hand, if you are aiming for a **floribunda**, **grandiflora** or even a **Hybrid Tea**

“**spray**”, remove the **central bud** of the cluster as soon as possible. By removing the larger, faster growing, central bud, it allows the smaller, slower growing buds to mature and bloom together in what is referred to as a “**spray**”.

If you have relaxed a bit in your spraying during the dog days of August, try to get back to a weekly schedule. We need to prevent **black spot** from destroying our fresh new foliage. Remember, **blackspot** cannot be cured, only prevented. We cannot wait for symptoms to appear before we start spraying. When symptoms appear on one bush, you could expect to see it on other bushes in a few days. Although a few varieties are resistant to **black spot**, none are immune. So how do we prevent **blackspot**? By sticking with a spray schedule using a good systemic fungicide like **Banner Maxx**. Adding a contact fungicide like **Manzate, Dithane, Pentathlon** or **Fore** offers extra protection. **Daconil 2787** or **Daconil Ultrex** can also be used when the weather cools. Some varieties, like **Crystalline, Moonstone** and **Opulence**, are more **blackspot prone** and are usually the first to get it when we slack up on spraying. My roses were relatively **black spot-free** until the second week of August when the sprayer quit working and we went more than two weeks without spraying.

The fall fertilization program should have begun in August but it's not too late to start. In the first week of September apply some organics like **alfalfa meal, fishmeal** and **milorganite**. Apply one or two cups each around each large bush in the rose bed. Apply less to the minis and to the potted roses. You could substitute **Espoma Rose-Tone** or **Plant-Tone** for the **fishmeal**. Also apply the following (per established bush): **1 cup of Lesco (17-3-11) professional slow release turf fertilizer, 1 cup of gypsum, 1 cup of dolomite lime**, and **¼ cup of Epsom salts**. Apply less to the minis and potted roses. Water well before and after applying these fertilizers. Continue applying **¼ cup of Epsom salts** every three weeks until blooming time. If your new growth is pale green or yellow, your bushes are probably suffering from **iron deficiency chlorosis** and could use a quick fix. Sprinkle **one Tbsp. of Sequestrene chelated iron** around the drip line of each bush and water in well. This will perk 'em up and get 'em out of those dog day doldrums, and that nice green color will return in no time at all. After this, a biweekly liquid diet supplemented with lots of water is guaranteed to reap results. And, with a little **Conserve** to keep the beasties out of the blossoms, you might even take **Queen of Show**.

The following is for those rosarians who prefer **SUPER roses** over **average roses**. About a week after our application of dry fertilizers, we should begin our liquid diet. The recipe is not secret and it hasn't changed. In a 32 gallon garbage can mix the following: **2 cups of Peters 20-20-20** or **K-Grow 15-30-15; 2 cups of fish emulsion; 1 cup of Epsom salts; 1 cup of Sequestrene 330 chelated iron; and 1 ounce of SUPERthrive**. I sometimes add a **cup of liquid kelp** and a cup of **liquid karma**. Fill with water, stir well and apply **one gallon per large bush, ½ gallon for potted Hybrid**

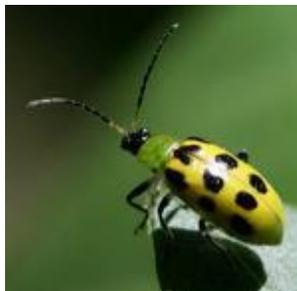
Teas and **one quart per mini**. For best results repeat the above in two weeks. In October you may want to replace the **20-20-20** or **15-30-15** with a **high phosphate formula**, the other ingredients remaining the same. Some high phosphate formulas to choose from are **Peters Super Bloom (10-50-10)** or **variegated African violet special (5-50-17)**, **Fertilome (9- 59-8)** or **Green Light Super Bloom (12-55-6)**. These water-soluble high phosphate fertilizers tend to shunt the energy from vegetative growth into **flower production** and developing **stem strength**. The **magnesium sulfate** and **chelated iron** increase growth and contribute to the dark green color of the foliage. It also intensifies the color and the substance of the blooms. But water is the secret to making these fertilizers work and most exhibitors hand water their roses every day starting two weeks prior to a rose show. Many dedicated rosarians who have the time prefer hand watering to automatic watering.

Be on the alert for **spider mites**. If they are detected wash them off with a **water wand**. Follow up with a good miticide if necessary. Don't wait for the spider mites to defoliate your bushes before you become aware of their presence. July and August are peak months for these sneaky little varmints and the cooler weather doesn't slow them down. I would seriously consider investing in a good water wand if you don't already have one. It is by far the best method for dealing with spider mites. Using it weekly will deter them. **Miticides**, like **Avid** and **Floramite**, although a little expensive, are sometimes necessary to clean up an infestation. I feel more comfortable with an arsenal of weapons and prepared to fight if spider mites dare to attack.

The **pest of the month** honor goes to the **corn earworm**. Most insecticides, sprayed on the buds and blooms, should keep this pest under control. **Mavrik**, **Talstar** and **Sevin** are recommended.

Western Flower Thrips are more difficult to control than any other insect pest. When we speak of resistance to pesticides, thrips have all the others beat by far. The secret to their control is to mist the buds and blooms frequently and to alternate insecticides. The pesticides recommended for thrips control are **Conserve**, **Avid**, **Orthene**, **Talstar** and **Merit**. There's no need to spray the whole bush unless you have **Chili thrips**, which also damage the foliage.

Cucumber beetles usually show up around the end of September. They munch on the buds, blooms and leaves. When not feeding you could find them hiding inside the blooms. **Mavrik** and **Talstar** are the best for controlling them but most rosarians like to pick them off and crush them between their thumb and index finger. At the moment I am dealing with a new pest, which is similar in many ways to the cucumber beetle except that it is brown and a little larger in size. I have not yet been able to identify it. Asiatic beetles have



the same feeding habits but they are larger and darker in color. We even sometimes see the lowly **aphid** making a return appearance in the fall but usually in sparse numbers and one spray with **Merit** will get rid of them until next spring. I did see some lady beetles yesterday so I must have a family of aphids somewhere in the garden. Don't let up on watering. The evening showers, which have been few and far between, usually don't supply enough water to satisfy our thirsty roses. A good soaking 3 or 4 times a week is best. Potted roses need to be watered daily. Check your mulch. Add more if necessary. As most of us know, the threat of hurricanes is the greatest in September. Tie and stake your large bushes especially those grafted on Fortuniana rootstock.

Start deciding what new roses you want to add to your garden. There's always room for one more. If you plan to **shovel prune** a few of your old bushes to make room for new ones, give them to a neighbor or someone who has been admiring your roses. I'm sure there are many latent rosarians just waiting to be introduced to rose growing.

Yes, I get excited just thinking about fall; cooler weather and big beautiful roses. So, what-a-you say Gulf Coast Rosarians, let's ease our roses out of their summer slump and get them ready for the **magical month of October**. The roses will always do their part. The rest is up to us whether we want average roses or **SUPER** roses. With a little extra hustle and no hurricanes, we can make rose growing this fall delightful as we celebrate the 22nd anniversary of the presidential signing that officially made the rose our national flower. Now, what president was that? Enjoy your fall roses and don't forget to share them with others. One of the greatest rewards in growing roses is seeing the joy they bring to others. **Happy rose growing in September.**