MAY ROSE GROWING

*Written by Henry Seiler, the 5th 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 theses 12 articles.*

Well Gulf Coast Rosarians I hope you were as pleased as I was with our first blooms of the season. I can't say that it was my best spring bloom but it was O.K. and we did get some nice roses. Although the night temperatures averaged above normal in March they averaged below normal in April with a few pretty cool nights. The winds were horrendous and the rainfall was almost totally lacking (about 2 ½ in. below normal). Although I thought our first blooms would come earlier this year, they actually were delayed somewhat by the low temperatures in April. And the fact that I pruned on schedule in February caused my first flush of quality blooms to come the week after the Mobile Rose Show. The only variety that was in full bloom was **Kardinal**. They were the last bushes pruned and the first to bloom. We had over 100 blooms and every one seemed to have perfect form which held exceptionally long whether cut or left on the bush. I may not have won any trophies in Mobile but I won a lot of hearts the following week on **Secretary's Day**, or should I say **Administrative Professionals Day**. In **1952, Secretary of Commerce, Charles Sawyer** proclaimed the first **National Secretary's Week** to be June 1 to 7 with Wednesday, June 4th designated as **National Secretary's Day**. In **1955** the observance date was moved up to the Wednesday of the last full week in April. I'm not sure who was responsible for that change but it must have been a rosarian from this neck of the woods who worked with a lot of secretaries. The low night temperatures in April contributed to the rapid spread of **botrytis petal blight**. The fungus damages all blooms but it is most noticeable as purple and red freckled spots on the lighter colored blooms and some buds even refuse to open. I could only feel sorry for those huge buds of **Affirm** and **Uncle Joe**. And I think every one of my 50 plus St. Patricks were affected to some degree. And yes, the **thrips** were there to greet the first blooms as they opened. I can remember when thrips didn't bother the first bloom cycle and wouldn't become a problem until after Mother's Day. But, times have sure changed. Whatever the cause, we have surely experienced a thrips population explosion in recent years. Misting the buds and blooms with an insecticide helps control the thrips but, like telling your wife you love her, it has a short residual and must be repeated often. Thrips quickly build up resistance so alternating insecticides is the best approach to the battle. **Conserve** (½ teaspoon per gal.), **Merit** (1/8 teaspoon per gal.), **Cygon 2E** (2 teaspoons per gal.), **Orthene 97%WP** (3/4 teaspoon per gal.) and **Talstar** (½ tablespoon per gal.) are all effective and should be alternated to prevent the thrips from becoming resistant. So, how often should you spray for thrips? That depends on how clean you want your

blooms to be. Misting the buds and blooms once a week offers good control. Misting them twice a week offers better control. Start misting as soon as the buds start showing color. And cutting the spent blooms and disposing of them before the petals drop is also important in thrips control. There is no need to spray the whole bush. Spraying the entire bush with insecticide is not only unnecessary, it is unwise. Reason? It encourages another uninvited springtime pest, **spider mites**. There is definitely a relationship between the indiscriminate use of insecticides and an increase in spider mite infestation. The reason has to do with the balance of predator and prey. When we spray insecticides, we kill off some of the natural predators that normally help keep the spider mite population in check. Unlike western flower thrips, which only damage the

flowers, spider mites severely damage the chemical factories of the bush, their leaves. And unlike aphids which pierce and suck sugar form the tender growth, spider mites pierce and mortally damage the chlorophyll containing mesophyll cells of the leaves. These are the cells where photosynthesis takes place. This is why mite infected leaves appear dry, mottled and bronzed. A single mite can injure as many as 20 cells a minute. Mite infection disrupts the normal physiology of the leaves and puts the entire bush in a state of severe shock. And, unlike thrips and aphids, spider mites give NO warning. They reproduce and spread very rapidly. Their life cycle is only one or two weeks long and as many as 17 overlapping generations develop each year. Each female mite lays about 100 eggs and, it is possible to find all stages of growth –from egg to adult—on the underside of a single leaf at the same time. The problem is they are not as conspicuous as aphids and thrips and show no symptoms until it is too late. They are especially damaging to the mini's because of their small leaves and compact growth. Several years ago, a rose society member paid a visit to one of our former presidents, also a consulting rosarian, and found her outside spraying for spider mites. He bragged on the fact that his roses were healthy and spider mite free. In fact, he said that he had never SEEN a spider mite. So the consulting rosarian, hoping to learn his secret, took a ride with him to see his mite-free roses. Well, after examining his roses she showed him something I'm sure he didn't want to see. He was introduced for the first time to SPIDER MITES--- an INFESTATION! Sooo, if you're SURE you don't have spider mites, check again. This time, very carefully. They usually start under the bottom sets of leaves and quietly work up. Washing the under surface of the leaves with a water wand each week before spraying helps wash some of the mites off. The weekly use of a water wand is especially important if you are practicing thrips control and misting the blooms with insecticide. There are many brands of water wands. One of the best is the **"Jet-All"** which can be ordered from **Kimbrew-Walter** in Texas. If the infestation is heavy you may want to mortgage the house and invest in a good miticide. The miticides of choice are **Avid** (1/4 tsp. per gallon), **Floramite** (¼ to ½ tsp. per gal.), and **Forbid** (1/4 tsp. per gal.) Other miticides include **Tetra San** (1/2 tsp. per gal.), **Hexygon** (1/2 tsp.

per gal.) and **Akari** (2tsp. per gal.). Why can't we spray one pesticide to control all critters? That would be great. The fact is that each pest is different. Most pests are insects but spider mites are arachnids. These new pesticides have become very specific and the modes of action differ from one to another making one pest vulnerable but the other one not affected at all. **Aphids** seldom were a serious problem in the past.

One or two sprayings of **Malathion** or **Cygon** in the spring took care of them until the following year. And we only had to spray if there weren't enough lady beetles to do the job. But the new generation aphids are not affected by the pesticides of the past. A few years ago, I had a spring infestation of aphids that I couldn't get rid of. In a bit of frustration I called my friend Sam Renfroe of Mobile. He said "you must have those new **super aphids** that are resistant to **Orthene**". That's when I was introduced to an insecticide of merit. Thanks to **MERIT**, aphids are no longer a major threat to my spring bloom. Although I limit my use of insecticides, I try to spray weekly with fungicide. Why spray fungicides if there is no fungus on the bushes? ANSWER: For prevention. IT is often stated that mildew is the most serious fungus disease of roses. But this is not true for roses growing here on the Gulf Coast where mildew is nothing more than a benign nuisance. Here on the Gulf Coast our number one enemy is **black spot**. But we can effectively control this disease if we develop a preventative program. At times, during periods of excessive rain, the disease may gain an upper hand for a while, but the dedicated rosarian always prevails. What should you use to prevent this most serious disease from destroying your leaves? Most rosarians across the nation use **Banner Maxx** (1/3 to 2/3 tsp. per gallon); some ARS members use **Triforine** at 1 tsp. per gallon. Most of us add **Mancozeb**, **Manzate**, **Dithane** or **Pentathlon** (1tbs. per gal.) for added protection. Many rosarians alternate **Banner Maxx** with **Compass**. Both are systemic but have different modes of action. This prevents blackspot from building a resistance. If the pesticides and fungicides mentioned are not available locally, you may purchase them from **Rosemania** (888-600-9665), in Franklin, TN, **Kimbrew Walter** (1-903-829-2968) in Grand Saline, TX, or **H.L. Shealy Co.** (803-892-2651) in Gilbert, SC. You may notice some die-back at this time of year. If your bush is otherwise healthy just prune it down to healthy cane and don't be concerned about it. Some varieties die back in the spring more than others. They just can't support more than a certain number of canes. So the older, weaker canes begin to die back. Some may have to be pruned all the way to the bud union. And speaking of **bud union**, May is the month for **basal breaks**. Yes,

it is after the first bloom cycle that we look for those cherished "**basal breaks**" and "**low laterals**", that strong new growth arising from the bud union and from lower "eyes" right above the bud union. These strong new canes are the lifeblood of our bushes. I get more excited seeing basal breaks on a bush than I do seeing its flowers. What could we do to encourage new basal breaks? **First and foremost**, remove all spent

blooms as soon as they become spent. Do not wait for the petals to fall and by no means let them form hips. Strong basal breaks require lots of energy as does the formation of rose hips. If the energy is wasted in the formation of hips, it cannot be used in the development of new strong canes. **Second**, remove the first few sets of leaves from the bottoms of the canes and remove all spindly and nonproductive blind growth to allow for sunlight to strike the bud union. **Third**, apply high quality organics like **blood meal**, **fishmeal** and **alfalfa meal**. Also apply ½ cup of **Epsom salts** and ¾ cup of granular fertilizer like **16:4:8** or **17:3:11**. **Fourth**, a good kick-in-the-pants, knock your socks-off liquid tonic should be applied to give those new “basal breaks” all the raw materials they need. Give each large bush one gallon of the following concoction then stand back and watch ’em jump! In a gallon of water, mix 2 tbs. of: **Peters All Purpose Plant Food 24-8-16**, 2 tbs. of **fish emulsion**, 1 tbs. of **Epsom salts** and 1 tbs. of **sequestrene chelated iron**. Make sure the bush is well watered before applying and be sure to water after. Appling this concentrated solution to dry soil will cause root burn and do more harm than good. Then we need to keep those new “basal breaks” movin’. Lots of water, a good fertilization program, being vigilant for spider mites, and weekly spraying for prevention of black spot will produce a strong robust bush that you would be proud of. And adding a teaspoon of a liquid seaweed extract called **Response** to each gallon of spray mix each week will help promote vigorous growth and increase the effectiveness of your spray material. This has been a secret weapon of exhibitors for years. You will see a noticeable effect on the color, size and vigor of your leaves. **Response** can be purchased from Rosmania. If you haven’t yet applied your summer mulch, you had better get busy. Hot weather is right around the corner. Applying the mulch now will make it easier on both roses and rosarians. Enjoy your May roses, and remember, share them with others. **Happy Mother’s Day** (where it applies) and **HAPPY ROSE GROWING IN MAY!** (applies to all).