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Written by Wally Richards.

PRUNING ROSES

It is about that time of the year when gardeners oil up their secateurs, put on their gloves and go out to do battle with their thorny but well loved roses.

Just how you go about pruning your roses is really up to you, but the most popular cut is to prune somewhere above the third or fourth outgoing buds. This will create a champagne-glass shape which means that the inner part of the rose will receive adequate light. Some in growing buds can be rubbed out to prevent the centre of the bush becoming too congested.

If you prune low to second outgoing buds, you will end up with strong new growths which will bear fewer flowers, but better blooms. If you prune high, say to the fifth or sixth outgoing buds, you'll end up with a denser bush with a lot of flowers.

PRUNING CLIMBING ROSES

Pruning climbing roses is a somewhat different affair. Assuming you don't want a rambling rose which grows where and how it wants, you need to shape your climbing rose to form a framework of main branches along a wall, a fence, or over an archway. The aim is to have the new season's growth sprouting from this framework and producing the much-wanted floral display, but to get to that stage requires careful training and selective pruning. After planting your climber, let the branches grow and tie them to the support over which the rose is growing, to cover the desired area. A reader recently asked me how many plants he should buy, and how far apart he should plant them, when putting in Dublin Bay climbing roses to create a solid "wall" along his fence line. I replied that the normal distance apart would be one metre, but it would be his subsequent pruning and control which would determine how thickly the lower part of the floral structure would grow. For example, I explained, take the lowest buds and train them sideways to fill in the space between the rose plants. Take the next buds at about 30 degrees, then 60 degrees, then 90 degrees until each rose has a fan-like structure from which each year's new shoots will grow. Once the wall is nicely covered, it is simply a matter of cutting back or tying in those growths extending too far from the wall.

Once you've established the basic framework of the climber, the only pruning needed is to remove any branches which have grown outwards and detract from the desired effect, and remove any dead wood, spindly growth or dead branches.

Over time, replace the old main branches with new ones which you have trained during the season to become part of the framework. Your work during the growing season of a climber consists more of training and tying back than anything else, as the branches will grow quickly from new shoots in the spring and summer period. The chances are, they will initially grow away from where you want them, but all you need do is tie them back to the framework. Then in winter, you can remove them if you want to prevent the framework from becoming too congested, or you can leave them in the framework and remove older branches instead.

It is really important to remember to never cut a climber down as low as you would a bush rose. Climbers treated in this fashion can revert back to bush roses. Always leave a few branches of a metre or more in length, even when doing a hard cut-back such as might be the case when you're repairing or painting the wall or fence.

PRUNING HYGIENE

I remember some years back a prominent rose grower criticised an article that I wrote about using hygienic practices when pruning roses or other plants. His retort was you

did not need to take any special care when pruning several roses, one after another. My answer to this is common sense and logic. If an aphid can travel from one rose to another and transfer a virus or disease then the jaws of a pair of secateurs are a lot bigger than the jaws of an aphid! Anyway lets read on a bit more;

Whatever rose you are pruning, and whatever technique you use, there are some invaluable tips you should adopt for the post-prune process. First, you must spray each rose with **Liquid Copper** immediately after pruning to protect the wounds. Don't, however, prune on a cool moist day as silver leaf disease is likely to be air borne in these conditions. It is also crucial to keep in mind that viruses can be transferred from rose to rose, so make sure you spray **Liquid Copper** onto the secateurs after pruning each rose. Alternatively, use methylated spirits. The latter is even better than the copper in providing protection. Simply fill a cup almost full of the meths, and dip the partly open blades into the cup, making sure all the cutting edges are well soaked prior to moving onto the next rose.

In a nutshell then, pruning consists of cutting back the rose, spraying the remaining canes with **Liquid Copper**, and then dipping the secateurs blades into methylated spirits. Then move on to the next rose and repeat the procedure.

That's all fairly simple isn't it? But let's give a few extra tips.

Take your bottle of **Liquid Copper**, (it has the great advantage of already being liquid so there is little risk of blocked jets in the middle of a job) and double the normal amount (which is 3.5 mls to a litre of water) to 7 mls per litre, add in one ml of **Raingard** so the spray stays on, rain or shine for up to 14 days. Mix up and place in a trigger sprayer and use this spray after pruning each rose to cover the wounds.

Once made up the spray will keep for sometime but you need shake the sprayer well as the copper will settle. When using **Raingard** or its spray on frost protection cousin, **Vaporgard**, you must remember that these are films which set on the areas sprayed, to obtain their benefits.

This means that after you have finished spraying with these aids, that you should flush and spray some clean water through your sprayer, otherwise the residues left will set and block up the jets.

Hot water is best to use for this purpose and spray the water till it runs clean.

If on the other hand you forget to do this simple task, then when you come to use the same sprayer again and find that the jets are blocked, you need to dismantle and clear the jets with a bit of fine wire and soak them in methylated spirits.

Choose your day to prune carefully; it should be after a few days without rain with sun and wind to dry the soil and air. This is very important as the deadly silver leaf disease favours entering fresh wounds when the air is moist and cool. In areas where silver leaf disease is a major problem extra care should be taken. It is also a very good practise in the spring, after a reasonable amount of new foliage appears, to give the roses a couple of sprays, a month apart, with **Perkfection**. This builds up the immune system of the rose and can allow a rose to recover from the disease if it is not too far advanced.

It also protects against a number of other diseases as well, through fortifying the rose's immune system.

If early in the season when the new shoots are out and we have a cold snap you can protect the delicate shoots with a spray of **Vaporgard**.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)