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### NEW ROSES, NEW SEASON

It will not be too long before the new season's roses become available in your local garden centres.

So how do you go about selecting your new rose? Well, outside of making your choice on the bases of flower type, colour or fragrance, the main thing to look for is a rose with four strong canes growing outwards at the cardinal points. If you can't find that, the next best thing is one with three strong canes growing at well-separated points from the centre. But, rest assured, all is not entirely lost if roses with either one or two strong canes are the only ones available. Given a season or two of good care, and with a little selective pruning, you can bring these roses back to the potential enjoyed by those which had four good canes to start with.

Another thing to check before making your purchase is that your rose has a reasonable-sized root system. Again, you're more likely to find this in a garden centre than in a supermarket or chain store rose, where root-pruning is more likely to have been done in order to get the plants to fit into the display sleeves. Keep this saying in mind: "You pay your money, and get exactly what you pay for".

If you buy bare-rooted roses, you heel them into the ground as soon as you get them home. If you can't do that immediately, place them into a bucket of water for a few hours, and then heel them in. "Heeling in" means making a hole in the ground and putting all the bare-rooted roses together in this hole, then covering their roots with moist soil. They can sit like this for a few weeks if need be, as long as the soil is kept moist.

When your new roses are in containers, or in planter bags, simply put them somewhere handy where you will remember to water them. It is vital to keep the planting mix moist. When you plant out your new roses, remember to plant them far enough apart to allow you to work on them easily when they are mature plants. It should also be in a very sunny position, as roses will always do poorly in shaded or semi-shaded situations. Ideally, avoid planting in an area where water tends to sit for extended periods during the wet season. If you really want to plant there, make raised beds.

Now, whether you have heavy clay soil or light sandy soil, the following planting procedure can be used. Dig a hole twice as wide and twice as deep as you need, then take half of the soil you have removed and mix it (about half and half) with good animal manure-based compost. Line the bottom of the hole with this, bringing the level right up to where you want to plant the rose. In heavier soils, it is best to plant the rose slightly higher than the surrounding soil level, so that it does not remain wet around the crown. In light, free-draining soils, plant the rose a little deeper than the surrounding soil, so the rose is in a bit of a hollow. This makes for easier watering, and any rain will flow into the hollow, thereby keeping the soil moist.

If you're putting your new roses into containers, plant so that the base of the rose's trunk is an inch or two lower than the rim, for the same reason. Your ideal container mix for roses should be compost, with about 20% top soil mixed in. It's a complete waste of time using potting mix, as it dries out too quickly and is more expensive.

The next thing to do is to sprinkle the following mixture into the bottom of the area you have created for planting - one tablespoon of **Rok Solid**, a handful of sheep manure

pellets, perhaps a handful of blood and bone, a tablespoon or two of dolomite or gypsum, and a level teaspoon of **Ocean Solids**. Then sprinkle over this a little more of the planting mix - just enough to cover the products. Now, sit your bare-rooted rose on the top of this, and carefully back-fill the hole, adding a handful of the mixture at a time. Once you've covered the roots, you can add more of the soil mix to bring the level up to the height the rose was in its original container. This is probably just above the top of the roots. Then gently firm down the mixture, while ensuring that the rose is positioned so that it is coming straight out of the ground, and not at an angle. You aren't planting a fence post, so there's no need to tramp down the soil and damage the roots. If you do need to put in a stake - as is the case with standard roses - these should be hammered into the ground before you even start putting any mixture into the freshly-dug hole. You also need to ensure that the stake is on the prevailing wind side of the hole, so that the rose will be blown away from the stake, and not right into it. There are a range of suitable stretch-type ties which can be used to secure the rose to the stake.

After you have planted your new roses, water them in with **MBL**.

You can prune your rose about a month after planting - perhaps in the middle or towards the end of winter. Do this before the rose starts to shoot. Simply cut the strong canes back to two to four out-going buds. There's no need to remove any weak canes at this point; the roses were half-pruned by the nursery before they were lifted, and were sprayed then with Lime Sulphur. Spray your pruning cuts with **Liquid Copper** before moving onto the next rose. It is also sensible to spray the blades of your secateurs with the same product, or with methylated spirits, between roses to make sure you don't transfer any diseases from one plant to the other.

It is very important to keep the soil moist during the first year that the new rose is in the ground. After that, it doesn't matter quite as much.

The more foliage your new rose generates during that first year, the stronger your root system will be. So don't cut flowers for indoor vases during this crucial first year. Dead-head the flowers by all means, without removing any leaves. Once that first year is over, you can treat the plant as you would your older, more established roses.

The shorter daylight hours and cooler temperatures of autumn herald in a time when your roses will start to ready themselves for winter. As is the case with other deciduous plants, roses absorb the last of the goodness out of their leaves before the latter turn yellow and speckled. This is all a perfectly normal part of nature's cycle, and the change brings with it a host of nature's cleaners - diseases - which get to work on converting the spent leaves to organic matter. It's quite pointless to try and fight against this process, but you can take steps to reduce the chance of these diseases carrying over to affect the next season's roses. May is a good time to cut your bush and standard roses back to about half their amount of growth. It is worth remembering, however, to cut the roses back only on a warmer day when there is less moisture around. Problems such as silver leaf disease favour cool moist weather to do their airborne worst on a rose. An easy gauge on how much to cut goes as follows - a bush about a metre tall should be cut to about half a metre, and any dead wood and spindly canes should be removed at the same time. Always remove the cut material and clean up the area around the rose before moving on to the next one. Then spray the remaining canes with a solution of Lime Sulphur, and if the soil is clear of other plants, spray the soil as well. Lime Sulphur burns off any foliage that is still on the roses, and at the same time burns out any disease spores and insect pests planning to overwinter on

your bush. But beware! Lime Sulphur can stain walls and the like, so if there is the remotest chance that the spray will drift to more than just your rose bushes, drape an old sheet over whatever you don't want to get stained.

Once that's behind you, your roses will be ready for their real pruning, which takes place somewhere in July or August.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)