

Gardening Articles for week ending 25th JULY 2015

Written by Wally Richards. [Photo]

HOW TO GROW HEALTHY ROSES

There are a number of things that are vital to a healthy plant besides sunlight, food and water and a healthy 'Soil Food Web'. That is those micro-organisms and beneficial fungi which not only live in the soil but also 'in' and 'surrounding' a plant.

Earthworms are also vital to healthy soil and plants; if there are no earthworms or few in number, you have a problem and you cannot hope to have a really healthy garden (soil) till you have good worm populations.

I talk about this and the following in relation to food crops but the same principals apply to having great roses also.

Plant Diseases are natural and are the garbage removers in nature, assisting in the quicker decomposing of plant material that has done its time, converting it back to organic food for other plants to live on.

In nature we talk about the 'survival of the fittest'. Plants that become weakened for some reason are very susceptible to diseases.

Pests also tend to hone-in on weaker plants rather than on the strong healthy ones. Gardens of my childhood, 50 odd years ago, were brimming with life, plants & roses were very, very healthy, no chemical sprays were used (there was no need for them)

It was impossible to put a spade into the garden without cutting a few worms in half.

The soil we had in those days was feed compost made from chook manure (everyone had a few chooks), and organic wastes. Other animal manures would be sort after along with sea weed.

All of these feed the soil life and worms, so plants in gardens, radiated health.

Vegetables and fruit grown were also brimming with health and contributed to a much healthier society than we see today. So what went wrong? We introduced chemically made fertilisers into the gardens and these fertilisers, knocked back the soil life including the worms.

Plants lost their healthy glow and diseases began to appear. So problems evolved, which made the chemical companies smile as they created new chemical sprays to solve the problems.

Fungicides may control some diseases but they also kill the beneficial fungi that the plants need for good health! New chemical poisons were found for killing the insects which were attacking our unhealthy plants.

These poisons were also killing the soil life and after a time the sprays (DDT, Arsenic of Lead etc) were found to be very dangerous to ourselves as well.

So they were banned. To be replaced by what was considered safer poisons, many of which have also been banned.

Most of the now fewer chemicals available to the home gardener currently, are likely to be banned also in time to come, as they also prove too dangerous to the environment and our health.(many have been already banned in some countries)

Herbicides also knock back soil life and can have long term residues. Weed killers containing Glyphosate is the most used chemical in agriculture with millions of tons of it going into the planet, worldwide each year.

Besides the damage it does to the soil over the long term it has been certified as a probable carcinogenic by the World Health Organisation.

Well that is the back ground to what has happened to our gardens and why our roses and other plants are not healthy as they should be.

What can you do to grow healthy roses and other plants? Firstly stop using chemical fertilisers and sprays. Purchase instead organic compost and mulches from your garden centre.

Look for the ones that contain animal manures and not made from green wastes as roses die if given compost made from herbicide effected composts.

.Sheep manure pellets was shown by consumer to the best all round garden fertiliser in trials they did a several years ago.

Other products that are beneficial to the soil include, blood and bone, sea weeds, Gypsum, Garden Lime, dolomite and any animal manures.

These will help feed the soil life and restore things as nature intended.

You can also fed the soil life with products such as Magic Botanic Liquid & Mycorrcin which assists in repairing the damage done by chemicals.

I was told by a gardener that had sprayed one group of roses with these two products for a season.

In autumn the roses thus treated were in flower, new buds coming, no sign of diseases and looking very healthy. Another group of roses not so treated were finished for the season, covered in black spot and rust and not looking happy.

The gardener also told me the treated ones all had produced scents that he had not noticed before as they were not scented type roses.

We need to build up the health of the soil and as this can take a season or two, during this time we need to protect our plants from diseases and pests without using chemical solutions that are going to affect the soil life. Pests can be controlled with Neem Tree Oil.

Neem Oil also tends to reduce the problem of black spot. Diseases such as rust, black spot, powdery mildew and botrytis are controlled by Sulphur sprays, not copper.

Copper is best for blights, downy mildew and bacterial diseases along with fruit tree's diseases. Thus a film of Sulphur over the foliage will give good external protection. Used every 14 days with Raingard added. (The alternative is sprays of potassium permanganate or Condys Crystals)

For internal protection you can boost the plant's immune system with Perkfection Supa. Used once a month only. If your garden lacks a good number of worms, then you need to get worms going again and the best way to do this is buy in bags of worms.

Put some into a good worm farm and seed the rest into the garden. You do this by making a hole and placing shredded wet newspaper and kitchen scrapes into the hole. Place a handful of worms into the hole then cover with wet paper and compost.

Do this in each major garden such as rose bed and vegetable gardens. To keep the worms happy and multiplying, mulch gardens a couple of times a year with wet newspapers covered with animal based compost or mulch.

It is also important for both worms and soil life not to water your gardens with chlorinated tap water. Put a filter (10 micron carbon bonded) to remove the chemical from the water.

Roses also need a certain amount of magnesium, potassium and trace elements. These are easiest to supply as Rok Solid plus Fruit and Flower Power. The small amounts required of these will not affect the soil life and be of benefit to your roses.

The reward would be perfect shaped roses, lush green foliage a mild to heady perfume.

A good healthy program would be a two weekly spray of Mycorrcin, MBL & Wallys Neem Tree Oil.

Every second spray or once a month add Perkfection Supa to the above at the lessor spray rate on the label.