

Growing & Caring for Roses

Roses are among the most beloved flowers in the world and have been cultivated for thousands of years. Valued not only for their beauty but also for their fragrance, roses were cherished by the Greeks, Romans, and Persians, who used them in ceremonies, gardens, and perfumes. Today, roses remain a timeless symbol of love and elegance, gracing gardens, bouquets, and landscapes with their abundant blooms and distinctive scent.

Choosing Roses

- **Sun & space:** Pick spots with 6+ hours of sun and good air flow; crowding raises disease pressure.
- **Disease resistance first:** If black spot or mildew are common where you garden (as in the Pacific Northwest), prioritize modern disease-resistant cultivars or tough species and old garden roses.
- **Form & use:** Hybrid tea (cut flowers), floribunda (clusters), grandiflora (taller clusters), shrub/English (full plants, repeat bloom), climbers (walls and arches), mini/patio (containers), groundcovers (edging).

Site & Soil

- **Soil:** Well-drained and rich in organic matter; target pH about 6.0 to 6.5.
- **Air flow:** Avoid tight corners and overhead irrigation where leaves stay wet.
- **Spacing:** 30 to 42 in. for many bush roses; climbers 8 to 10 ft along the support.
- **Why:** Drainage, sun, and spacing are the three biggest levers for fewer diseases and better bloom sets.

Planting

- **Bare-root:** Plant in late winter to early spring; soak the roots, spread them over a soil cone, backfill, and water well.
- **Potted:** Plant anytime the ground is not frozen or very hot; loosen the roots, set at the same depth, and water deeply.
- **Graft union:** Above soil in mild areas, 1 to 2 in. below in colder regions.
- **Mulch:** Apply 1 to 2 in., keeping it clear of the canes.
- **Why:** Correct depth, firm backfill, and immediate watering prevent settling and die-back; mulch stabilizes moisture and temperature.

Watering

- **Goal:** Deep, infrequent watering to 8 to 12 in. soil depth; keep foliage dry with a soaker hose or drip line.
- **Rule of thumb:** In summer, most in-ground roses need about 1 to 2 in. of water per week in total, counting rain and irrigation.
- **Containers:** Check daily in heat.
- **Why:** Even moisture reduces stress, petal scorch, and bud drop; dry foliage reduces foliar disease.

Feeding

- **When:** Twice per season for repeat-flowering types: early spring as growth starts, then again after the first flush.
- **What:** Balanced rose fertilizer or a general granular feed; scratch it in lightly and water, and always mulch after feeding.
- **Why:** Timed feeding supports continuous bloom without forcing soft, disease-prone growth.

Mulching

- **Depth:** Apply 2 to 3 in. of compost, shredded bark, leaf mold, or well-rotted manure; keep it a few inches away from the canes to prevent rot.
- **Benefits:** Conserves soil moisture, regulates root temperature, suppresses weeds, and reduces the soil splash that spreads disease.
- **Seasonal care:** Refresh in late winter or early spring after pruning, and top up in midsummer if the mulch has broken down.
- **Extra tip:** Organic mulches gradually improve soil structure and fertility as they decompose.

Pruning

- **Timing:** Late winter to very early spring, when the buds just swell (often “after forsythia blooms”). If you miss it, tidy up after the first flush.
- **Basic steps:** 1. Remove dead, diseased, damaged, and crossing canes. 2. Open the center for airflow. 3. Cut to outward-facing buds at a slight angle about 1/4 in. above a node.
- **Hybrid tea / Grandiflora:** Reduce to 3 to 5 canes and shorten by one-third to one-half.
- **Floribunda:** Keep more canes; shorten by about one-third and favor a rounded framework.
- **Shrub / English:** Light to moderate thinning; reduce overall height by one-quarter to one-third, and every few years remove a couple of the oldest canes to the base for renewal.
- **Climbers:** In late winter, tie the laterals horizontally and keep the long main canes; after bloom, shorten the side shoots to 2 to 5 buds.
- **Once-blooming heirlooms:** Prune after they flower, not in late winter, to avoid removing buds.