

Letters To My Niece Floricide
By Jim Delahanty

February 2008

Dear Floricide -

There are three major concerns in the garden this month: pruning, fertilizing and pesticides.

Pruning: Despite your reference to the remaining rose canes as 'stumps,' I assume you left the usual three or four buds for the purposes of new growth and renewed zeal for bloom and foliage. If you have just recently pruned, don't forget to use a dormant spray—either one of the traditional lime sulfur sprays or one of the more modern formulations. Many rosarians now recommend using even 'Superfine' horticultural oil as being sufficient to suppress insect and fungal pests from overwintering. If you fibbed about completing your pruning, do not fret. The worry is not good for your rosebush as it leads to hand tremors and other reactions detrimental to the health of your rose.

Although February 14 or Valentine's Day is the usual date of completion of pruning chores, many people find that their pruning takes them well into the shank of the year. And the roses will not suffer much from the extension. However, do try to complete any essential pruning tasks like the removal of dead wood, criss-crossing branches, and other impediments to good air circulation soonest. Just remember that even deadheading is a form of pruning that occurs throughout the year.

Fertilizing: I hope you followed my advice this year and did not fertilize the roses immediately after you pruned them. Last year's carnage among the rose bushes elicited some pretty rancorous talk at the last rose geezer's meeting. Vinnie Mueslix wanted to march right down and remonstrate with you. Fortunately, he left his address book with his Felcos in the mailbox and I reminded him that his wife declared remonstrations tabu after the last time he remonstrated. In any event, generally, fertilizers should not be used until after the foliage on established plants has greened up, and you probably should eschew fertilizing new plants until after the first bloom cycle. Exceptions to the foregoing rule include timed release fertilizers which require a warm soil to operate. Just dig a short 3 inch hole parallel to the rose bush and insert a half cup of a timed release fertilizer for regular plants and half that for miniatures. And be sure to water before you fertilize in any case. Even better, do it before an impending rain storm so as to conserve water.

Remember that mulches can also decompose and add nutrients to the soil in addition to suppressing weeds. Be careful about using cocoa hull mulches because they can be hazardous to dogs of the canine variety; unfortunately, they have no ill effects on the human kind.

Pesticides: You can grow roses without using very toxic petrochemicals, but the blooms won't be show roses. Exhibitors tend to max out on the use of the latest and most expensive technology; you can identify them easily because they prefer fragrances such as Eau de Flit.

If you decide to go that route, please be sure to use proper hazmat clothing: hats, goggles, respirators, long sleeves, non-respiring gloves appropriate to toxic materials, etc. And

be extra sure to wash your clothes and your own self after every application. If, on the other hand, you want to use organic approaches to fungal protection such as baking soda or other suffocating agents, you will have to be assiduous in your maintenance of that program. There are some products out there such as Eco-Erase, which does have some curative effect as well as preventive, but it tends to vary from one plant to the next. And it is most effective with plants that already have foliage of some substance and are already resistant to mildew, etc. Wiltpruf™ is another product of some renown for preventive purposes. Many rosarians recommend systemic products as being less toxic and more effective; however, be careful, since you are still growing some rose plants in pots on your balcony, as the poisons can build up and wreak havoc with your roses if the pots are not flooded once in a while.

Oh, yes. WATER. If February brings ample rain, turn off the sprinklers. If there is little rainfall, supplement it to the tune of about an inch of rain per week. If there is no rainfall, be sure to water enough for the plants to get that elusive inch of rain per week. And prepare for rate hikes.

If there is ample rain, water rates must be raised in order to accommodate the fact that people are not using water in sufficient volume to cover the costs of supplying it; if there is no rain, then water rates must be raised in order to deter people from overuse of the water. If there is too much rain, water rates will have to be raised in order to build new storage facilities for the predicted drought down the pike. You will notice that all roads, ample, drought and too much, lead to the same conclusion. This is known in bureaucratic circles as the water shaft.

Til next month,

Uncle Rosaholic

March 2008

Dear Floricide -

We are coming to the end of the rainy season with perhaps only a little between now and sometime in April. You have to ensure that the roses get enough water even though it may appear that their needs are being sufficiently slaked. Check the drainage in your rose beds. Extremely sandy soil can drain very quickly and leave the roses gasping for water. Contrarily, roses hate to be sited in soggy soil and develop odd diseases normally only seen on your children.

Food. Now is the time to be serious about fertilizer. Roses are not all that particular about food; they do not enquire about labels and will happily devour whatever sustenance you place before them, kind of like your daughter Adiposa. Also like Adiposa, they are not self-regulating. You have to seek the sensible balance between the ability of the rose to absorb fertilizer and consequent negative conditions. Overfeeding can cause dieback; insufficient watering while feeding causes leaf burn. Too much nitrogen in your fertilizer just provides delicious meals for marauding aphids and, believe me, the aphids will come. At that point, you have to decide what kind of a gardener you are and what measures you will undertake to be rid of them.

The imperatives of Integrated Pest Management dictate that you take the least toxic methods available to rid yourself of pests. Now this operates within a sensible framework. There is no point in re-training little Pellagra to tear off aphid wings. For one thing, by the time he learns the knack the damage will already be done; for another, aphids only develop wings to get to new feeding places when the current ones have been depleted. The first real line of defense is water: use a jet stream water to displace the aphids. The idea is that they will not be able to carry themselves back to the plant and will die a hideous and painful death. But, sometimes if your luck is being constant, friendly ant farmers will transport the aphids back to the plant in order to harvest the evacuations of the aphids.

If the weather turns hot for a few days, you may have to cope with spider mites. Spider mites are dangerous in comparison to aphids. Spider mites are both hard to get rid of and can destroy a plant. Once again the first line of defense is a jet stream of water, this time directed to the undersides of the foliage where the spider mites breed. The idea is that creating a wet environment disturbs their breeding conditions. Repeated streams of water every three days should cause their ranks to diminish.

Of course, in either case, the pests can be eradicated with the application of appropriate petrochemicals. The spider mites, however, require a miticide because they are not insects but arachnids; miticides are hard to find and very expensive, more expensive than replacing the roses. Additionally, there are two downsides to the petrochemical approach. One is that the products tend not to distinguish between predator versus beneficial insects. The other downside is the potential negative impact on the

environment and you. Now I know you will jabber that, despite the evidence, you can read the warning labels and take the proper precautions. But many people cannot.

Powdery mildew may make its appearance if it hasn't already. Powdery mildew is a fungal infection that leaves a powdery white or grey colored residue on the leaves, stems, buds, and even the petals of some roses. It is most likely to occur when there are warm moist days and cool nights. The most sensible approach is to tear out the rose that is susceptible and replace it with a more resistant variety. Now I know you are not going to do this; I mean, you even kept your kids despite the odds. So you might do the second best thing: ignore the problem like you did with little Rickets. Both he and roses will survive a little cosmetic damage now and then. By summer the mildew will be gone. Finally, you can attempt to manage the damage by using a smothering product like Eco-ERASE, a wax of the jojoba plant, or some other product like Serenade, a bacterial agent of some repute; both of these have been known to be effective as well as organically sound in their effects.

Finally, you can, if you have the time and money (but not from me), engage in preventative action by spraying the appropriate triformine or other products over a seven to ten day schedule. As I recall, your monitoring things on a schedule produced little Adiposa, Pellagra and Rickets in the first place. I would seriously advise prophylactic measures of a less complicated nature.

Until next month

Uncle Rosaholic

April 2008

Dear Floricide -

April is NOT the cruelest month, T. S. Eliot notwithstanding. In fact, Descanso Gardens lists April as one of the best months for roses to bloom. But blooming roses bring new cares and concerns. One of those concerns is cutting roses for home, for show, and/or plant health. The process of removing spent flowers is called deadheading. You can do this at the abscission zone, that place below the bloom where the desiccated stem snaps off with ease at the application of a little pressure with the thumb and forefinger. Doing this will result in the emergence of new stems and blooms directly above that break. This is the method adopted by the Royal National Rose Society to produce a greater number of flowers as opposed to a smaller number of blooms of greater quality and size. You can do this with your bare hands, or those of Pellagra, if you are in a punitive mood. If you want exhibition roses, you would cut at a point where a five leaflet leaf appears, with an extra allowance for a really good stem. The trouble with that, of course, is that the length of the regrowth period is extended and the number of flowers is diminished. The standard practice, of course, is to remove a spent blossom at a point where the first five leaflet leaf appears at an outward angle.

As with many things in life, you reap the consequences of your choices. I should add that it is not wise to let little Adiposa ingest the rose clippings; even though her mouth is not tender, the occasions when you use petrochemicals might prove distressful, if not fatal.

As the combination of warm days and cool nights becomes the norm in the Southern California spring, a constant concern is powdery mildew. While not fatal to the rose, it is regarded by many as unsightly, unless you have a fondness for grey color combinations. Here is where you prove your mettle as a gardener. You can engage in minimalist gardening, i.e., do nothing. Eventually the weather will change and the conditions favoring powdery mildew will disappear. Or, plant roses like 'Lynnie' or 'Home Run' that resist (successfully) powdery mildew. Or, plant Earthkind™ Roses, which may get the fungus but will survive it beautifully, anyway. Another approach is to use various home remedies, like baking soda, water, aspirin or other combinations. Some products like Eco-Erase, a wax of the jojoba plant, smother the mildew by coating the foliage with the mix of wax and water. Another organic product is Serenade™ a mix involving the use of bacteria to colonize the pathogens (it is more of a preventative than a curative, however). If you are determined to avoid any appearance of mildew, then you must follow a program of spraying with Orthene™ or Funginex™ on a regular basis, roughly every week or so. Do not use these products when the temperatures reach 85 degrees or higher, as burnt foliage will result. Not even Adiposa will eat baked leaves.

A final concern is spider mites. Spider mites can barely be seen by the naked eye, and resemble tiny grains of sand should you shake the rose bush over a sheet of white paper. The damage, however, that they do is significant. The symptoms include yellowing foliage and plants with weakened vigor and disease resistance. Since they are mites, they

are not generally suppressible by the use of insecticides. You could buy a miticide—the cheaper one sells for \$270 a quart, whereas the high class one goes for the same price per cup (concentrates). Or you could spray the undersides of the foliage of your roses with water (ever increasing in price, of course) every three days until the hot dry days cease and the breeding conditions disappear. Unfortunately, no one has yet bred a rose that is impervious to spider mites as they are an equal opportunity predator.

Finally, although I understand your decision not to join your local rose society because of the competition given the ratio of available women to available men, I cannot agree with it. Given the combination of red (noses) white (faces) and blue (hair) in the average rose society, it is your patriotic duty to join.

Til next time,

Uncle Rosaholic

May 2008

A Letter to my Niece, Floricide -

May arrives and only one thing is sure: there will not be enough rain to sustain even drought resistant roses. Therefore, pay attention to your roses and their need for water. Water regularly, on a schedule that accounts for unseasonably high temperatures, or the arrival of desiccating winds. On some hot dry days, you may even have to water your roses in containers more than once to compensate for the evaporation rate. While we are heading for the inevitable 'June gloom,' there will be days of aridity to rival the Sahara. Do not rely upon the advice of Pellagra: I have seen him walk right past plants ready to jump him and suck his juices dry, they were that thirsty. Probably the best indication of a need for water—before the plants wilt noticeably—is to stick a thin metal rod into the ground; it will penetrate damp soil easily and find resistance where the soil is dry.

Another concern is fertilization. A good rule of thumb is to remember that roses consume 'food' like starving teenagers. And like teenagers, they will even consume more than needed (By the way, have you put Adiposa on a diet yet?). While nitrogen is essential for the maintenance and development of roses, too much nitrogen is believed to be the cause of vegetative centers in blooms and explosive growth in foliage at the expense of bloom. You can choose between organic and non-organic products. If you are in a hurry, remember that chemical products do not have to break down in order to be of use to the plant as do organic products. Some very fine exhibitors manage the use of the various fertilizers in a complementary manner. Some very cheap rosarians take the position that since roses are essentially non-discriminatory in their absorption of food, anything will suffice, so long as it is on sale. By the way, if you skimp on the watering before and after the application of fertilizers, you will defeat the purpose of making plants stronger and disease resistant. The result will be burned foliage, burned roots, and weakened plants.

I confess I do not understand your aversion to exhibiting roses at rose shows. May is chockfull of rose shows, which are essentially 'show and tell' times for adults. The object is to show the goods in the best possible light. To this end, you groom your roses to remove blemishes and to highlight assets; you are not unfamiliar with this process. You cannot become a major heavy hitter among exhibitors unless you are willing to devote time and effort to growing and grooming roses for the purpose of entering competitive rose shows. However, the benefits of better roses, the camaraderie of the exhibiting groups, and the demonstration of the extent of your garden more than compensate for the extra effort. Caring for three rambunctious children takes time and energy; however putting that effort into roses not only produces beautiful roses, but you don't have to deal with a parole officer.

Finally, you really should take a look at products that attempt to stimulate the rose's natural defenses. There are a couple of products on the market that operate on the principle that the stimulation of a plant's natural defenses against disease represents the

best approach to rose diseases and pests. A product like ‘Messenger, TM operates on this principle and it seems to make a scientifically valid difference in the modern rose garden; it also represents a major break from the older tradition of ‘better living through chemistry’ by poisoning the diseases and pests while poisoning the careless user and the environment.

I would also suggest that you have a talk with Ricketts. I caught him smoking the other day in the rose garden. When I pointed out that he could stunt his growth, he responded with a farrago of nonsense about using the smoke and fire to kill aphids individually. You might point out that the only way he could be successful in that endeavor would be if his lungs became as black as the heart of a politician.

‘Til next month,

Uncle Rosaholic

June 2008

To my niece Floricide -

Normally, I would start out by noting that 'June is busting out all over...', but that description must now be reserved for no longer little Adiposa. In any case, June weather brings Southern California 'June gloom' of coastal clouds to much of the coastal and near inland areas including zones Sunset Garden zones 20 through 22. At the end of the month, the inland valleys can expect the kind of scorching weather that causes television reporters to waste perfectly good eggs on concrete sidewalks. Some pundits say that the weather in Southern California never changes, but that observation is usually made by people shivering in air conditioned studios or confined to the demilitarized zones of West Los Angeles and environs.

For those of us who garden in this climate, there is frequently much too much weather like the four days of 100 degree temperatures in May immediately followed by tornados, thunderstorms, lightning, rain and freeway closures. Rain is rare in June. Rose plants must be carefully watched to ensure that they receive enough water (about one to one and a half inches of water a week). Two good soakings a week should take care of it. However, container plants have to be monitored with a great deal more attention. Over time, container plants become rootbound, or the soil may become compacted, causing the water to pool on the top or puddle at the bottom. Ideally, container rose plants should be checked for rootbound conditions at least every three years. Cut back the roots about an inch and add new soil, or transplant the bush into a larger container. Get little Ricketts to see if he can add the polymers that absorb water and release it into the soil over time. It is one way of bringing him into contact with water (although watering the alien life forms in the creases of his skin may be counterproductive).

Water is essential not only for the immediate needs of plants, but also for combating pests and plant diseases. Spraying the undersides of leaves can deter the growth of spider mites. Some authorities recommend combating spider mite infestations by spraying the undersides of plants every three days to break the breeding cycle; others simply take the view that spraying the undersides of leaves every day when the weather is hot and dry will do the trick. In any case, the use of water to combat diseases and pests has a long and respectable history in American horticulture. Nearly a hundred years ago Georgia Torrey Drennan in 'Everblooming Roses' recommended the use of water to deter or remedy almost all rose problems.

A strong jet of water dislodges aphids and also may dislodge the bristly rose slug (sawfly larvae). The latter graze on the undersides of the leaves and create a pattern of lacy damage. Methods of control of the rose slug include hand-picking the small green caterpillar like varmint and crushing them to the use of insecticidal soaps or the application of Spinosad,TM an organic remedy involving the use of a bacteria to suppress an outbreak. A further note on hand-picking as a control measure: in the early stages of an outbreak of a pest, hand-picking may be very effective, but once there is an

overwhelming number of predators, you have to resort to more toxic measures. Of course, you have an advantage—you can always tell Pellagra that picking off the insects will get him in trouble with the authorities; that usually induces a major spate of activity on his part.

The first flushes of spring rose bloom are now over. Deadheading, whether for quality of bloom by cutting back deeply on the stems to the 3rd from last five leaflet leaf or for quantity of bloom by snapping off the dead bloom about an inch below the peduncle, tells the rose bush that efforts to reproduce through flower production must be resumed. In fact, failure to deadhead will reduce flower production significantly in some cultivars. If you are unsure of whether to cut way back into the stem of the rose or to snap off the dead bloom at the abscission point, just follow the traditional recommendation of cutting back to the first five leafed node at an acute angle facing outwards to encourage growth in that direction.

Finally, at the beginning of summer, you might find circular holes at the margins of some of the foliage on the rose bushes. This is damage caused by the leaf cutting bees; they remove sections of the foliage to line their nests in preparation for breeding. There is nothing you can do short of lying in wait for the little beggars and ‘Raiding’ them individually to Kingdom Come. This is the horticultural equivalent of ridding the world of a minor social boor with an Uzi. Spraying the leaves does no good because the bee does not ingest the foliage; the same advice holds true with respect to systemics. The best thing to do is to accept the situation. It is kind of like the advice the therapist gives you with regard to your children. Unless you want to give them up for adoption, live with it.

Til next month,

Uncle Rosaholic

September 2008

A letter to my niece, Floricide -

It is September, and your roses look like the insects and fungi fought World War III while you drowsed in the air conditioning, or lazed in the pool, or just slept around. Give the roses a little grooming for the fall. The hot sun of July and August, combined with dry heat, frazzles some roses right into a kind of pouting dormancy. In the triple digit heat and single digit humidity, roses like 'Dream Come True,' 'Rhapsody in Blue,' and 'Cinco de Mayo' can lose their leaves, stop growing and blooming, or turn unsightly colors. At Exposition Park this summer, in the middle of horrible heat waves, both 'Cinco de Mayo' and 'Pink Promise' respectively turned ugly or white. Basically, there is no cure for the heat although you could create sun covers as many Arizonans do. Of course, your neighbors will want to know why your roses are getting more care than your children.

The other thing you can do is water. Then water. Then water again. The optimal recommendation might be one and half inches of water per week. The only problem with that scenario is that the Los Angeles area is under drought restrictions. The regulations range from the irksome—you have to ask for water in restaurants, to the rose endangering—you have to water at night, for example, and no water is permitted for more than 15 minutes from one watering station unless such station emits under two gallons of water an hour. These represent the minimum restrictions in Phase 1. There are five phases, the culmination of which is no landscape watering whatsoever. Now I know that little Adiposa, Pellagra and Rickets will be delighted by the prospect of the abolition of baths; you will simply have to remind them that all evidence to the contrary, they are not potted plants.

There are some other sensible ideas connected to the conservation measures. Leaks, and the improvident uses of water by letting sprays irrigate tar, asphalt and concrete have to be repaired or curtailed. And it would be a good idea to use the polymers that conserve water in your pots and containers. IF your community permits it, the use of gray water would be a service to the community, since the children's bath water probably contains more nutrients than commercial fertilizers.

You also have to prepare for October. October is the second best month for roses in the Southland. Whether you use a time release product like Osmacote or Apex or the traditional any-product-on-sale, remember that you have to water before and after the application of fertilizers, otherwise the plant might suffer from foliage burn. And with many products, water is necessary in order to activate the absorption of the nutrients and make them available to the rose. A hundred years ago, the cure for more rose ills was the judicial application of water. Now that we know some of the dreadful consequences of petrochemical 'cures,' we may wend our way back to water cures, only to find that they are barred by considerations of drought.

You should also try to attend the Fall rose shows. Even if you don't exhibit, you might find a gentleman caller. Or a Hell's Angel.

You can also consider planting new roses, since the fall planting of roses is considered to be one of the prime times for such activity (barring the occasional Santa Ana or heat wave). Select roses for their suitability in your own microclimate. There is no point in looking at pretty catalogs, because the roses are pictured at a state of perfection that the average gardener reaches maybe once in a lifetime. Buy roses with a proven track record. Ask around your neighborhood. Visit some local rose gardens. See what has been a traditional rose in your area. There is a record of 'Lamarque' blooming in the San Gabriel Valley with 158,000 blooms on it. 'Mutabilis' is on every list of roses brilliant in Ventura County, as well as the Earthkind™ list; go visit the one at the Stagecoach Inn Museum Rose Garden. Contrariwise, 'Leonidas,' has never bloomed successfully outside of a greenhouse or a fog bank of Immunex™.

For God's sake and mine, pick your roses more carefully than the fathers of your children.

Until next month,

Uncle Rosaholic

October 2008

A Letter to my niece, Floricide—

October by tradition is a month of Mischief Night, hazardous driving through vicious ‘trick or treaters’ at dusk, the nigh end of Daylight Savings Time, U.N. Day and other horrors. Here in Southern California, it is also the second best month of the year for our roses. There is finally respite from the triple digit heat and single digit humidity. The roses perk up in vigor and color to produce the final significant flush of the year before the Socal version of winter saunters in sometime in November. Some russet roses like ‘Brown Velvet,’ actually begin to resemble their names. The salmon colored roses, like ‘Margo Koster,’ finally acquire a color other than that of boiled ham; in fact, sometimes ‘Margo’ will start winning trophies to attest to its unusual and pleasing hues.

It is still necessary to water your roses carefully ensuring that there is sufficient moisture, especially in connection with the last fertilization of the year. If you were exhibiting, you would have started the process of preparing for the fall season of rose shows back in late August or early September as the Rose Show season runs from the second week in October through the first weekend in November. Even if you have sprayed for various rose ailments up to now, now is probably the time to consider not doing so. Invoke the principles of IPM—Integrated Pest Management—and let little Adiposa, Pellagra, and Ricketts earn their keep by picking off whatever insects visit your roses. It will not seriously harm Adiposa if she ingests the little critters unless they have been sprayed with something more toxic than her usual intake of fast food.

Up to this point deadheading and de-budding for sprays or splendid singular blooms have been a regular part of your garden regimen. Consider letting nature have its way and let hips develop. Not yours—that ship sailed a long time ago—but the development of pods full of seeds for future rose bushes—the teleological purpose for which the rose proffered blooms in the first place. Hips come in a range of colors including red, orange, and purple as well as in a variety of shapes from little pea pods to cherry tomatoes to miniature urns. These can be the basis for wonderful arrangements in the holiday season at the end of the year. And there is beauty to be found in the unusual juxtaposition of hips and varied colored canes and prickles.

The collision of fall and winter in our climate also evokes questions regarding shovel pruning—the act of removing poor performers and questionable roses from the garden. Given the size of the average rose garden, keeping roses that acquire rust or predictable mildew is a fool’s game. It is like the problem of keeping Uncle Maximowicziana alive. He consumed an incredible amount of family resources, showed no promise of ever becoming even minimally useful and required professional caretakers at exorbitant fees and indifferent success.

It was a no-brainer to let him go. Granted that the children cried for a few seconds over the loss of their pet gerbil, but life is not a pet infirmary. And a city garden is not a rose

infirmity. If it rusts, throw it out. If it mildews even in summer, discard it. And if it black spots, you have moved to Louisiana and no one told you.

Throw out roses that acquire disease, do not bloom, or require special care. You cannot cull your febrile children, but you can improve the stock of the world's roses. Do it in October.

Until next month,

Uncle Rosaholic

November 2008

A Letter to my niece, Floricide -

November and December are the months in which you can stop fertilizing, deadheading and spraying your roses because it is time to induce whatever dormancy the rose may need or want. It is not unlike loving your children best when they are on the verge of sleep and least obnoxious. Not all roses wish to be in a dormant state, of course. ‘Secret Garden Musk Climber’ will bloom twelve months a year, if you will let it do so. ‘Brown Velvet’ not only justifies its name in coolish weather, but turns a brilliant oxford red to grace a Christmas table. Many of the russet roses are at their absolute best when the weather begins to cool.

There is a chance that watering chores could be eased by some early winter rains in November or December. Of course, there is also a slim chance that Pellagra or Ricketts will be on the honor roll, and that little Adiposa won’t eat her report card on the way home from school, so it is best not to count on it. But the cooler weather will make it easier to abide by whatever water restrictions are in operation when the rainy season starts—or doesn’t, as the case may be.

November and December with the reduced rose chore schedule represents the downside of living in a semi-tropical area with mild winters—namely, that while people in the so-called temperate climates of the East and Midwest get a few months respite from rose chores, that never really happens in our demi-Paradise.

If you are a Type-A personality and cannot refrain from doing something in the garden, a thin layer of mulch is always a good idea if only to help with the conservation of water and to deter some weeds.

Now is a good time to consider and reconsider what you want and what you are achieving in your garden. For the young or the young at heart, it is a time to experiment with new and different roses—to expand the kind of roses you grow.

Consider a rose like ‘Felleberg,’ a china with clusters of red/pink blooms that requires almost nothing in the way of feeding, spraying or pruning. It will just gradually build its way up to eight or nine feet displaying those cerise blooms in the midst of bluish-green foliage. If you are elderly, it is time to start thinking about reducing the burdens of the garden to a manageable level; in fact, it is time to start teaching your grandchildren to learn to garden by doing—under threat of disinheritance.

And if you have planted roses with other plants whose nutritional and watering requirements conflict, you can relocate one or the other to restore order and harmony in your garden. In fact, it is a good time to consider the winnowing of poorly performing roses in your garden, especially with the advent of the bare root specimens in local nurseries and garden centers. Be sure, however, to avoid barerooted plants that have sprouted already, because the energies of the plant have already been spent in an untimely and useless growth that will drop off when planted leaving a weakened and energy depleted rose bush.

And, finally, it is time to give thanks that you won't have to depend on little Adiposa, Pellagra, or Ricketts for your care when you reach my age. At least, not if you have been listening to their plans for your estate.

You can also be grateful that here you do not have to pretend that some rose manqué is the Christmas Rose. You can have the real thing. Be sure to tell the relatives when they call on Christmas Day and rub it in. Exaggerate the temperatures, but not enough to encourage them to move here.

And pray for rain on New Year's Day.

'Til next year,

Uncle Rosaholic