

PLANT ROSES IN THE FALL FOR EARLY SPRING COLOR

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In the past a lot of emphasis has been placed on buying and planting roses in early spring. Along the Gulf Coast, grafted modern roses are delivered to nurseries as bare-root plants in January. Nurserymen must pot the roses in containers and sweat them out until leaves begin to form before making them available to customers in mid-to-late February. Because spring is when grafted roses show up in stores we deduce that spring is the right time to plant roses. This deduction is only true for modern grafted roses. It is not true for own-root roses.

Own root roses are not grafted. They are the same plant above ground as below ground. (Figure 1). They are created by rooting a cutting from a mother plant and are an identical clone of the parent.

Own root roses can be planted at any time of year – however, fall is the best time to plant own root roses.

In the fall, temperatures are lower and the plant is not called upon (like it would be in the spring) to produce blooms. This allows the plant several months to work on developing a healthy strong root system that will support a big spring bloom cycle. Because one would not typically “prune” a fall-planted rose bush the first spring, it will be among the first garden roses to bloom once temperatures are conducive for doing so.

The severe drought conditions along the Texas Gulf Coast provide another compelling reason to plant roses in the fall. Some are predicting these drought conditions will continue through 2012.

This year saw many instances where spring-planted roses, in the ground only a few months, were hit with almost no rain by May followed by 100+ degree weather from June to September. Spring-planted roses have struggled – not only to overcome the drought and desiccating air temperatures, but most importantly because they did not have time to develop a strong root system before getting hit with hard environmental conditions.

It is important for a rose bush to have a complex and expansive root system capable of seeking out soil moisture and nutrients. My mentors say, “The better the root system, the better the plant” and in my own yard that is certainly true.

To plant an own-root rose, dig a hole one and a half times the size of the container. Mix ½ cup of bone meal in the soil in the bottom of the hole. Carefully remove the plant from the pot taking care to not disturb the root ball. (I cut the bottom out of the plastic pot first, set the plant in the pot in my planting hole and then slice away the plastic pot. This keeps all the soil and roots intact). Back fill the hole with soil. Cover the surface of the soil with shredded hardwood mulch. Water the plant once a day the first week, every other day the second week and every third day the third week. From that point water as needed. In fall-planted roses, it is imperative that no fertilizer be applied until spring.

Regardless of whether the drought predictions for 2012 are realized, planting roses in the fall gives us a head start on a great spring bloom season.



Figure 1. Own root rose

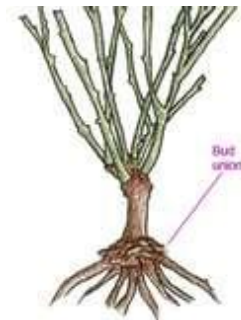


Figure 2. Grafted Rose



Figure 3. Spring Bloom in a Fall-Planted Bush