

The kindest cuts

Ruthless pruning keeps rosebushes healthy

By **RICK ROSEN**
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As Valentine's Day approaches, thoughts turn to roses. And a gardener's thoughts should turn to pruning the bushes.

CHORES

Pruning reinvigorates a rosebush, keeps it healthy and ensures that the blooms are as big and abundant as possible. Says acclaimed rosarian and author Stephen Scanniello in *A Year of Roses* (Cool Springs Press, \$24.99), "The worst thing you can do for a rose is not prune it."

Though Valentine's Day has been the traditional time to prune roses in this area, spring-like weather seems to be coming earlier each year.

So, if a hard freeze is unlikely, don't wait. Go ahead and prune your old garden roses and modern hybrids now. Except for climbers; don't prune them until after their spring bloom or you'll have no flowers in April.

Old and modern bush types are pruned the same way. However, prune a repeat bloomer more severely than a bush that blooms only once per season.

Your goal is to ruthlessly prune so that the bush is airy, bowl-shaped and much, much smaller. Why bother? Opening up the plant increases air circulation, which makes disease and insect infestation less likely.

FOLLOW THE LEADER: PRUNING GURU STEPHEN SCANNIELLO



Photos by NATALIE CAUDILL/Staff Photographer

1. Remove brown deadwood, discolored canes and any canes that insects, diseases or storms have damaged. Mr. Scanniello (above) examines a bush in a garden in the Swiss Avenue Historic District.



2. Starting at ground level, thin out and open up the plant. Also, remove one of any two canes that are rubbing against each other. Remove spindly canes and twigs and canes that grow into the middle of the bush.



3. When deciding where to cut, leave an outward-facing bud.



4. Cut back, severely if necessary, the remaining canes so that you are left with a bush that is 24 to 36 inches tall and consists of four to eight canes.

OTHER TIPS

Choose a good-looking bud eye — the point from where a future branch will grow — and make the cut about one-fourth of an inch above the eye.

When choosing where to prune a cane, leave an outward-facing bud. This ensures that the bush grows out, not into its center.

On a climbing rose, leave long canes long so they can be trained onto a trellis or other structure.

Use a good, sharp pair of pruners, and disinfect them first with rubbing alcohol. You also may need a saw and loppers for large old canes, especially if you have never attempted this chore before.

Mr. Scanniello, who is in the area frequently to work in the Heritage Rose Foundation study garden in Collin County, recommends removing all the leaves from the bush after pruning, because last season's leaves can harbor disease.

- If a freeze follows the pruning, cut off the die-back.
- Rake up any leaves and twigs to prevent the spread of disease.

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Where'd all the worms come from?

Our patio and porches are covered with dead earthworms. This has not happened in the past. What is going on? *D.M., Lewisville*

Earthworms sometimes come out of the ground en masse, apparently after being surprised by sounds or vibrations or both. It happens in the healthy soils of organic gardens, so I don't think it has to do with toxins in the soil.

The exodus seems associated with lightning, drilling rigs, diesel engines, electrical lines, transformers and other such activities. Not much can be done about it. Just keep the soil healthy and attractive to earthworms.

When is it best to release trichogramma wasps to control pecan nut casebearers? *J.R., Boerne*

Trichogramma wasps should be released when the pecan tree's leaves begin to appear in the

ORGANIC ANSWERS



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spring. Second and third releases spaced two weeks apart are ideal.

You've talked on the radio about a grass that holds up to the wear and tear of dogs. What is the name of the grass? *P.J., Crowley*

Buffalo grass, a native Texas turfgrass, is by far the most durable, but it needs to be established before dogs can play on it. It also needs to grow in full sun. It can be planted from seed or solid sod.

My Christmas cactus is pot-bound. The pot is filled with roots; the leaves look pale. *D.K., Frisco*

Repot it and add a little compost and a gentle fertilizer such as coffee grounds or Yum Yum Mix. Also, Christmas cactus doesn't like being kept too warm.

How do you de-ice sidewalks and steps? *J.S., Crowley*

Spread lava sand, decomposed granite or basalt sand. They benefit the soil after being swept or washed away. Salt and chemical de-icers contaminate soil and groundwater.

RESOURCES

- ONLINE:** www.dirtdoctor.com for free organic-program handouts
- RADIO:** KSKY-AM (660), Saturday 11 a.m.-noon and Sunday 8-11 a.m. www.ksky.com.
- MAIL:** P.O. Box 140650, Dallas, TX 75214

THE WEEK

TUESDAY HEALTHY LIVING

COMPASSION:
Check out our monthly installment of healthy virtues.

WEDNESDAY TASTE

LIFESAVERS:
We tried to warn you about Valentine's Day. But we have help if you forgot.

NEXT WEEK HOME

ECO-FRIENDLY IN AUSTIN:
Why PBS' *This Old House* finally films in Texas.

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Valentine's Day Ideas
Candlelight concoctions, romantic settings and pretties in pink to make your Valentine's Day sweet.
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GARDENING FOOL



MARIANA GREENE
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Squirrel fatigue

Mariana Greene's armed with pepper spray and patrolling her tulip beds. Her Gardening Fool column will return next week.

HOME

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