

Water, Water, Water

By Bill Kozemchak

Established roses need at least one inch of water a week. Water deeply; the root zone should be wet 12 – 18 inches below the surface. Lightly watering will bring feeder roots closer to the surface, allowing them to dry out quicker. Measuring this could be done with a rain gauge or by watering and digging near the bush. Do not dig right next to the bush as you would disturb or cut roots. Generally this would require 2 – 4 gallons per bush depending on rain during the week and the type of soil (clay, loam, or sand). The root zone should be kept constantly moist. Do not let watering go a couple weeks and then try to compensate with extra water. Dry conditions will result in smaller and fewer blooms. New growth will show signs of wilting when moisture in the soil is low. In very hot dry weather, you may want to water twice a week.

Newly planted roses may require more frequent watering. New planted roses do not have an established root system to absorb as much moisture as established bushes. The best way to get a new rose going is with plenty of water, but don't drown it.

Potted roses also require more frequent watering. Depending on the type and size of container, they may need to be watered daily or every other day. Most potted roses do not have as much soil to draw moisture from as those planted in the ground, so they need more frequent watering. Unglazed pots will also dry quicker than glazed or plastic pots. Trays under the pots, or pots with attached trays will lessen your watering chores.

Roses do not like wet feet. Roses like well-drained soil. Heavy clay soils may not allow the water to drain easily and will starve the roots of oxygen. This results in lower sets of leaves yellowing and falling off. The soil can be amended with sand and, or organic material (peat moss, compost, leaves, etc.) to loosen the soil structure.

Mulching will conserve moisture in the soil. Heavily mulching will reduce the need to water. It will also reduce the soil temperature and reduce the number of weeds in the garden.

Watering is done many ways. Roses can be watered by hand. This can become very time consuming with a large number of bushes. Basins can be built around individual bushes or around whole beds. These can then be filled to allow the water to deeply soak the soil inside. Sprinklers can also be used. Soaker hoses or drip irrigation are very useful in large gardens, they save an enormous amount of time in a large garden. Automated systems are another way to get the job done. Use whichever method works best for you.

Overhead watering should be done early. If you overhead water by any method, do it early enough so the foliage dries before sundown. Wet foliage at night can cause fungal problems.

Watering on a hot day can cool the bushes. Roses can be stressed during periods of high temperatures. The bushes may transpire more moisture than they are able to take up through the roots. A midday cooling shower can help relieve this.

Watering can help control insects. Some pests can be removed with a strong stream of water. This can reduce the need for pesticide use. Aphids are easily removed this way. Spider mites are a nuisance during hot dry weather. They can defoliate a bush in a short time. A strong stream of water to the underside of the leaves 3 times, 3 days apart should disrupt their life cycle and solve this problem.