

Hidden Rose Supports

by Tom Mayhew, Consulting Rosarian

An unobtrusive or hidden rose support is sometimes desired when growing climbing roses, shrub roses or Old Garden Roses in the front yard, along a driveway or walkway, or in other areas where you do not want to draw attention to the rose support structure itself.



An inexpensive rose support, which will be hidden by the roses that climb it, can be built using one-half inch thick steel rods (rebar) that are spray painted green and are erected in the garden to form a tepee-shaped structure. The tepee can be constructed in the form of a tripod using three rods or a “quadpod” using four rods. The steel rods are either eight or ten feet in length, depending on the height desired. The rods are inserted about one and a half feet into the ground, at an angle, and are clamped together at the top with a steel clamp. The clamp, which can be screwed tight, is the type used on automobile hoses, and it is also spray painted green. The finished rose support is approximately 6 to 8-1/2 feet tall depending upon the length of the steel rods and how far they are inserted into the ground. A single large climbing rose or other rose needing support can be planted in the middle of the tepee. Alternatively up to three or four smaller roses needing support can be planted between the rods at the base of the tepee, depending upon whether its a tripod or a “quadpod”. Clematis can be added to share the rose support, to provide additional color and to help conceal the rose support structure so that it disappears under the plant growth.

The materials required include the steel rods, which can be purchased as reinforcing steel rods (rebar), the clamps and the spray paint for outdoor use. Rust-Oleum, Hunter Green, outdoor satin finish spray paint provides a nice color for the structure. These materials are available at a home project center like The Home Depot or Hechingers. In addition, something is needed to remove the rust from the steel rods before painting.

The steel rods, as purchased, normally have some rust on them and you need to be careful how you handle them so that you do not get the rust on your clothing or your car's upholstery. Gloves and cardboard can help provide protection when transporting the steel rods. The rust can be removed using a product like Ex-Rust or something similar. Ex-Rust is a chemical rust remover which can be ordered from KANO Laboratories Inc., 1000 S. Thompson Lane, Nashville, TN 37211, Telephone (615)-833-4101. They also have a plastic bottle and sprayer which is convenient to use for spraying the Ex-Rust on the steel rods.

The whole process of cleaning the steel rods of rust and spray painting them green takes a few days. It is convenient to prepare 9 to 12 rods at a time, which is enough for 3 or 4 rose supports. The process can be done by placing several layers of newspaper on the ground at a place in the back yard where you don't mind losing some grass for a while. The newspapers are used to absorb the excess Ex-Rust and spray paint. Place some logs or other support on the thick layers of newspapers and then lay the rods next to each other on the logs. Spray the steel rods with the Ex-Rust and a few hours later rotate the rods and spray them again. Do this several times until you are satisfied that the rust has been removed. Wash the rods with water and when the rods are dry, spray paint them green. Let the paint dry and then rotate the rods and spray paint again. You will need to rotate the rods and spray paint several times until you are satisfied that they are completely painted. You can also paint the clamps while you are painting the rods.

The construction of the tepee can be accomplished by using a shorter steel rod or spike, about 3 feet long, used to make the hole for the finished painted steel rod. With the aid of a short handled sledgehammer, drive the short steel rod temporarily, and at an angle, about one and a half feet into the ground at the place where you want the rose support to be. Three long bamboo sticks can be temporarily inserted into the ground to form a tripod as an aid in establishing the angle of the hole. Pull the short steel rod out and replace it with one of the painted rods. Do the same thing for the other painted rods. The rods are then tied together at the top with a clamp and tightened with a screwdriver. A final touch-up is then done by giving the clamp a final spray with the green paint. The rose support is then ready and the holes can be dug for the roses. If, at a later date it is desired to move the rose support, it can be taken down with little disturbance to the area. The total cost of the rose support should be less than \$25, especially if the materials are amortized over several rose supports.