

Roses

Antique roses and other well-adapted roses have simple, but specific requirements to be beautiful and rewarding players in your garden. First, roses must have well-draining **soil**. Most soils in Central Texas are composed of either clay or rocks. If you have clay, add lots of compost. Add 4-6 inches and work it into your soil with a good sturdy shovel, garden fork, or tiller. Gypsum is also a miracle-working amendment for breaking up clay. Add gypsum at a rate of 4 pounds per 100 square feet. If you don't have any soil (you know who you are), create raised beds with a high quality, compost-enriched soil. Raised beds must be at least 12 inches deep, but 24 inches is ideal. The raised bed should also be a minimum of 2 feet wide. If you just can't deal with your soil or lack thereof, put your roses in big pots filled with a good potting soil. When planting the rose, make sure to allow the first roots to be visible above the soil line. This is the root flare. Planting any deeper will result in a rotted stem.

All roses perform best with at least 6 hours of **full sun** every day. Sunshine promotes lots of big, healthy blooms, helps dry out damp foliage early in the day (thus avoiding fungus), and promotes lush, dark green, healthy foliage. The Hybrid Musk class of roses will tolerate less sun, but they still prefer as much sun as possible. If you have less than 4 hours of sun, plant something else.

It's very important to give each rose enough **space** – check the label for the maximum height and width and provide no less than that. Roses, especially Antiques, have very different personalities. They vary widely in growth habit, bloom shape, color, and leaf size. Choose the right one for your space. A rose is more likely to develop fungus if it is too crowded, since the foliage cannot dry out quickly after a rain or heavy dew. The fungal diseases most common in roses are black spot, powdery mildew, and rust.

The first two years in the ground, antique or other hardy roses *may* need a deep **watering** about once or twice a week in the summer, once a month in the winter – if we're not getting rain. After two years, a deep watering about once every two to four weeks should be enough in the summer; every four to six weeks in the winter. Plants in the hottest, sunniest location will need the more frequent watering cycle. Overwatering is one of the fastest ways to promote fungal diseases. Also, avoid wetting the rose's leaves when watering.

The purpose of pruning is to control the growth of roses – especially climbers – remove dead canes, and to stimulate new growth, which is where the blooms will be. Pruning also makes narrow or sparse bushes thicker and more robust. The best time to prune roses in our area is around Valentine's Day.

Step 1 – Use only clean, sharp, bypass pruners. You can sterilize the blades with Lysol or rubbing alcohol or a 10% bleach solution (9 parts water to 1 part bleach). It's a good idea to sterilize your pruners between each plant to avoid spreading any diseases. Start by pruning out any dead canes.

Step 2 - Remove any canes that are growing in towards the center of the plant. Your goal is to create a generally “upside-down umbrella” shape, with all the canes heading out from the center.

Step 3 - Cut each of the remaining canes back $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$, cutting about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch above an outward facing bud. This is to encourage outward-facing growth.

Roses bloom nicely on their own with lots of sunshine, but if you want more blooms you can fertilize. Apply a quality dry organic fertilizer in the spring and/or fall or use an organic liquid once or twice a month during the spring and fall months. Roses also love compost. Add 2 – 4 inches of over the root zone in the spring and again in the fall. Be sure to avoid covering the stem or the root flare with the compost or mulch.

With proper preparation and minimal maintenance, antique roses can be one of the hardiest and most beautiful plants in our landscape. Enjoy!