



New Dawn rose. Photo credit: AgriLife Extension Service.

Pruning Landscape Roses

by Janice Tapp, Bexar County Master Gardener

The olfactory and visual rewards of cultivating roses are some of the many benefits reaped from the labor of love in cultivating the many varieties of roses. Roses need pruning to rejuvenate the plant and to promote health and blooms. Once a gardener engages in rose cultivating, it is beneficial to learn about the specific type of roses you are growing, in order to apply appropriate maintenance. Different types of roses are each pruned a little differently. For example,

climbing roses are pruned differently than most shrub-type roses. And depending on the results you desire, you may choose to prune lightly or heavily. For example, hybrid-tea roses are often pruned hard/heavily in order to produce larger blooms on fewer stems, which make for a good cut rose for displaying. While landscape/hedge roses (bushy roses grown for their flowing in the landscape) will provide more abundant blooms on multiple stems, if pruned lightly. This will create more color impact in your garden.

Roses can be lightly pruned year-round, such as when you are deadheading (removing dead, shriveled old blooms) or cutting roses for bouquets. This type of pruning promotes new growth. But for a heavier annual pruning to promote rejuvenation of the plant, the ideal time is just around the corner!

While many publications talk about a springtime pruning for rejuvenation, spring is a little late in South Central Texas. You want to prune after dormancy, when the buds are just beginning to swell. For us, mid-February is the most likely time for our roses to be coming out of dormancy. Hence, the common reminder around here to prune your roses around Valentine's Day.

A few terms are defined that may be helpful in understanding the pruning instructions:

Cane: *the main stems*

Basal breaks: *new shoots*

Suckers: *unnecessary stems growing below the graft union*

Dormant bud: *a bud which is currently not expanding (a.k.a. dormant) but in process to continue growing into a bloom*

The ideal equipment to use when pruning the canes is a clean, sharp pair of bypass (a.k.a. scissor-type) hand pruners. These will give a sharp, clean cut on a cane as opposed to anvil pruners which can mash the cane. Other useful tools are loppers (again bypass types), and a small wood cutting saw. Leather gloves are extremely helpful when dealing with thorns.

The first step in pruning any rose is to remove dead, damaged and diseased canes. Dead canes are brown and dry inside and live canes will reveal green living matter when cut. Cut



Proper 45° cut on a rose cane. Photo credit: R. Trexler, (<https://extension.unh.edu/resource/winter-protection-roses>)

these dead brown stems all the way down to the base or back to where it joins another healthy stem.

Next prune old, non-productive canes. These canes are often scaley in appearance. Remove these the same way you remove dead canes.

Finally, prune to improve the overall shape of the bush and promote new growth. Reduce the length of overly long canes by making a 45° cut ¼-inch above an outside facing dormant bud. This will cause the new growth to go outward, rather than towards the inside

of the bush, which can result in crossed canes that rub together, causing open wounds on the canes.

If the cane is smaller than a pencil, nip it off, as it is weak and not productive. The goal in this fine tuning is to remove the inner branches and leave 4-8 outer canes so that the rose bush has a vase shape and promotes good air circulation.

The height of the bush is determined by its location. If you have roses as a border or backdrop in your garden, you will decide what height is best for your viewing. Otherwise, a final height of 18-24 inches is most common.

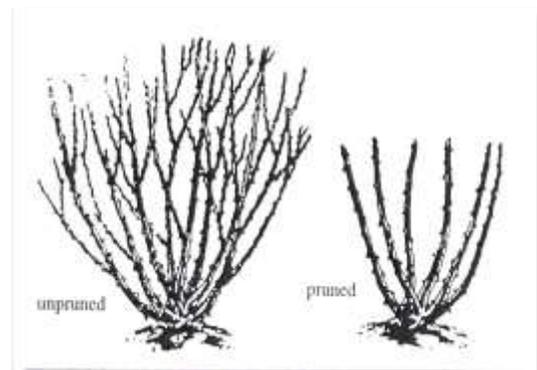
Prepare a place to toss the cuttings for a quick and easy clean up. Clean up is an important step. Remove leaves and stems that could be diseased with insects or fungus and harm the plant. Allow for good posture and sun protection while working to leave you and the rose bush in good spirits.

Pruning can be a tedious but quite rewarding process when your well pruned rose bush is bursting with beautiful blooms in the spring!

For more information:

[Make pruning an annual part of maintaining your roses](#) by Adam Russell, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.

[Rose Care, Fertilization and Pruning Methods](#) by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. Archives of Aggie Horticulture.



Vase-shaped pruned roses promote good air circulation and renewal growth. Graphic credit: Oregon State Extension Service.