

# Roses *a common sense guide*

Roses grow well in the mild climate and plentiful rainfall of the northwest. But fungal diseases and pests also enjoy our local conditions. This makes roses one of the most heavily sprayed ornamental flowers. Can you grow beautiful roses without toxic pesticides? You bet!



**Aphids** are small, soft-bodied insects that cluster on buds and new leaves. Eggs live through the winter in protected nooks. Most infestations cause little physical damage and do not spread disease.<sup>1</sup> Aphids have many natural predators, such as ladybugs and lacewings, which may be harmed more by chemical controls than aphids are.

## Steps to Healthy Roses

Rather than trying to rid roses of pests, focus on keeping your plants healthy to increase disease resistance.

### 1 Choose Disease-Resistant Plants

If you are struggling with a rose that suffers from black spot, mildew, or rust, consider replacing it with a resistant type. Before you buy, refer to the list on the back of this fact sheet, or ask at your nursery for plants that thrive in western Washington.

### 2 Give them Sun and Air

Place roses so that they receive adequate sunlight, at least six hours per day, preferably in the morning. Sunlight dries leaves, discouraging disease. Space plants so air circulates around them as they grow to maturity. In early spring (about mid-March), remove stems that aim toward the center of the bush to improve air circulation. Prune off dead and diseased canes.

### 3 Improve Soil for Plant Health

Soil should be well drained and rich in organic matter. Add well-rotted compost or 1 cup of alfalfa pellets per plant to the soil. Fertilize in early spring with a natural, slow-release fertilizer and compost, aged manure, or fishmeal. Excess nitrates in quick-release fertilizers cause spurts of lush but weak growth, which aphids and diseases love.

### 4 Manipulate Moisture

Water deeply once a week to encourage deep roots. More frequent watering may be necessary during hot, dry spells. Place soaker hoses or drip irrigation around the roots to avoid wetting the leaves. Damp plants are more susceptible to black spot. If you do use a sprinkler, give leaves time to dry before nightfall. Place an organic mulch such as

## Common Rose Problems in the Puget Sound Area

**Powdery mildew** is the most common rose disease in our area. It looks like a white powder covering new leaves and causing them to curl. The spores survive the winter in canes and leaf buds. Mildew does not survive on dead plant material. It is spread by wind and likes humidity, but too much water destroys spores. It appears in late summer when nights are cool, days are warm, and mornings are foggy.

**Black spot** is a fungus that creates black splotches surrounded by yellow on leaf surfaces. It requires water to reproduce and grow - spores spread by splashing water. Spores survive the winter. For black spot to thrive, leaves must be continuously wet for seven hours.

**Rust** looks like orange dots of fungus. It starts on the undersides of leaves in mid- to late- summer. The powdery orange spores are carried in the wind. Moisture must be on a leaf for several hours for rust to take hold.

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Diseases are just  
a plant's way  
of telling you  
something is  
not right. //

- Rodale Press



THURSTON COUNTY  
WASHINGTON  
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ground bark around plants to conserve moisture.

## Keep it Clean

Pick up and throw out diseased plant parts – do not compost them. After pruning diseased plants, wash tools in soap and water and swab with rubbing alcohol. In summer, clip off old flowers by cutting the stem at an angle, just above a cluster of five leaves. You can apply a dormant oil and lime sulfur spray to pruned ends to prevent insect damage. As summer ends, stop cutting flowers and let them form into hips (fruits), which signal the plant to slow down and prepare for winter.

## Least-Toxic Chemical Controls

Even by carefully following the practices above, you still will not have perfect, disease-free rose plants every year in the northwest. This is okay! Roses can have as much as 30 percent of the leaves, fruit, or flowers damaged without causing long-term harm.

If you do decide to treat for a pest or disease, there are several less-toxic chemical products available in local gardening stores and catalogs. Be sure you know exactly what you are treating for, and carefully follow label instructions. Before treatment, test all remedies on a small portion of the plant to check for damage.

**Disease:** To control powdery mildew and reduce black spot, try this widely used, university-tested

remedy:<sup>4,5</sup>

1 Tbs.	baking soda
2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> Tbs.	horticultural oil (available at most garden stores)
1 gal.	water

Mix and store in a labeled, closed jar. Spray as a preventative or as soon as symptoms appear. Best applied in cool weather.

**Insects:** A good spray of water from the hose will knock aphids off the plant. They can also

simply be squished between your fingers. To prevent a reinfestation, you can suffocate insect eggs with a winter spray of horticultural oil, such as a dormant oil and lime sulfur spray. If you see plant damage from insects you can also use “Safer Soap.” Thorough coverage is critical with sprays. Spray from the bottom up, onto the underside of the leaves. Follow directions carefully to achieve good control and limit the possibility of plant damage.

## For More Information

For more tips on rose care and resistant varieties, contact WSU Cooperative Extension’s Master Gardeners at 360-786-5445 ext. 7908, Monday-Friday, 9am to 1pm. Or get advice from an Olympia Rose Society Consulting Rosarian at [www.olyrose.org](http://www.olyrose.org). Ask for the least-toxic solutions.

For specific recommendations on pesticide products and their use, contact WSU Cooperative Extension’s Master Gardeners at 360-867-2163, Monday through Friday, 9am to 1pm.

To receive this guide in an alternative format, please call 360-867-2674.

For gardening information, including free guides to aphids and lawn care, call Thurston County Environmental Health at 360-867-2674 (TDD line 360-867-2603). We welcome your questions and comments. A list of our publications can be found at [www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehcsg](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehcsg).

### References

- 1) Hoffer, M., J. Pscheidt, and J. DeAngelis. August 2000. Controlling Diseases and Aphids on Your Roses. Oregon State University Extension Service, publication EC 1520. Corvallis, OR.
- 2) Robson, Mary. February 27, 2000. Choosing Good Roses for Puget Sound. Washington State University Cooperative Extension Service. Regional Garden Column. Website: <http://gardening.wsu.edu/timely/index>.
- 3) Pscheidt, Jay W. and Cynthia Ocamb. Revised annually. Pacific Northwest Plant Disease Control Handbook. Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR.
- 4) Long, Becky. 1995. *Least-Toxic Management of Rose Diseases*
- 5) Quarles, B. 1992. *On the Research Front: Roses, Mildew and Bicarbonate*. Common Sense Pest Control. (8) 2:4.  
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## A Partial List of Disease-Resistant Varieties<sup>2,3</sup>

### Hybrid Teas:

Elina (yellow blend); Honor or Pascali (whites); Fragrant Cloud (red-orange); Queen Elizabeth or Fame (deep pink); and Olympiad (red).

### Floribundas:

Iceberg or French Lace (white); Sexy Remy (pink); Europeana (dark red); and Playboy (orange).

### Climbers:

Altissimo (dark red); Dublin Bay (medium red); Iceberg (white); Climbing America (orange); and Polyantha (pale pink).

### Shrubs:

Sally Holmes (white w/ yellow center); Rosa rugosa, hybrid rugosa (magenta or white); Hansa (deep purple-red); and Bonica or Simplicity (pink).

### Antiques:

Souvenir de la Malmaison (pink).

### David Austins:

English Garden (apricot); Mary Rose (medium pink); and Fair Bianca (white).

Prepared by the Thurston County Hazardous Waste Program, a joint effort of the Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department, Environmental Health Division; Thurston County Water and Waste Management Department; the cities of Thurston County; and the Washington State Department of Ecology. June 2005

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