

Passing on Knowledge Learned from Growing Roses

By Carol Chicci

In 2014, I completed the master gardener class and volunteered at the Olivia White Hospice Home Garden. Eleven years later, I am still taking care of the seventy-plus roses in this lovely garden. During that time, I have read many books and magazines on roses and have applied this knowledge every step of the way.

Several horticultural practices have proven themselves in keeping the Hospice roses healthy. First and foremost, I have learned to choose only roses that are cold hardy to USDA growing zones 5, 4, or 3 for Flagstaff. Here is one case in point: There was a certain rosebush in the garden that, under a favorable environment, would have produced orange flowers. But not only did this specimen bear few flowers, it was undersized and had a lot of die-back each winter. It eventually died. When I consulted rose websites, I found that this particular rose variety to be acclimated to no lower than Zone 6.

Fortunately, we can now find the USDA growing zones, plus a list of other characteristics, of a rose variety on the Worldwide Web. Simply open your search engine, type "Rosa," then the name of the rose. A list of nurseries selling this rose will appear and upon opening their website, you'll search for your rose and find its particular characteristics, including its USDA growing zones.

The second most important practice is to water roses regularly. This is effectively done by installing an irrigation system. Set the system to water your roses for about fifteen minutes, three times per week. It takes roses three years to establish in our climate, and adequate water ensures the bush and roots will develop fully.

Wait until your rose's third spring to prune it. Until then cut away only the dead branches and foliage—your rose needs every leaf for photosynthesis, which provides food for maximum growth. Prune when the branches have leafed out, and the danger of a freeze--twenty-seven degrees, or lower--has passed—usually mid-May. Using a sharp bypass hand pruner, cut off the least-healthy of any two crossing branches that are touching.

To prune, follow the cane down to the height you desire. The tiny bud at the base of a leaf will develop into a new branch in the direction the leaf is growing and produce a flower at its end. Cut one-half inch above the leaf that is pointing toward the outside of the bush. Remove no

more than 20% of the foliage each year. Additionally, eliminating the top thinner branches ensures that your roses will develop sturdier canes.

Fertilizing your roses after pruning will promote robust plant and flower growth.

Carol Chicci, a certified Master Gardener of the Coconino Master Gardener Association, has grown roses in Phoenix for 15 years and for 12 years in Flagstaff. She is a member of the Denver Rose Society and American Rose Society.