

The Recipe for a Hearty Rose



Shropshire Lad

By Carol Chicci

I have taken care of the seventy roses in the Olivia White Hospice Garden for the last ten years. During that time, I have written many articles about roses for *Gardening Etcetera*, the Coconino Master Gardening Association column appearing in the Arizona Daily Sun.

As I have mentioned in some of my previous articles, we do not have as much leeway with our growing practices here in Flagstaff as many other regions of the United States. Because of our cold, long winters, we have to make it a priority to find and purchase roses that are sufficiently cold-hardy to survive.

Also, with our short growing season, we must realize it will take longer to establish a rose's root system, about three years. The rose will need moderate, regular watering during this time.

For my article, I will liken the steps required for growing a strong, healthy rose to the steps followed in baking a cake. For example, baking a cake requires foundational ingredients like flour, leavening, and sugar. The foundation for growing a rose in Flagstaff is choosing a variety that is cold-hardy to USDA hardiness Zone five, is high in disease resistance, and whose mature size fits into the space allotted for it. (Flagstaff is now classified as Zone 6a but selecting roses that can withstand the coldest temperatures is still the best practice.)

With any cake recipe, there are certain ingredients you can choose to satisfy your own tastes, like flavorings, fruits, and nuts. Roses also have many options including the following: the shape of the bush, such as a climber or a floribunda; having repeat blooms throughout the season as opposed to one heavy spring bloom; and the number and color of the petals.

Continuing our analogy of preparing a cake, we know the best ingredients will not result in a luscious cake unless it is baked at the recommended temperature for the prescribed amount of time.

Similarly, the finest rose may die unless it is planted in a balanced soil of sand, silt, clay, and organic matter.

Now, how to plant your carefully chosen rose. Be sure to keep the root ball moist while doing the following: dig a generous hole 16" X 16", leaving the sides rough to prevent the rose roots from circling and hindering its growth. Amend the soil dug from the hole by mixing it with forest products mulch in a ratio of one part mulch to three parts soil. Place the container with the rose into the hole. Estimate how many inches of prepared soil will be needed to have the crown (bud union) of the rose (the area where the canes grow upward and the roots downward) at a level of two inches below ground level. This way, the soil will help protect the crown from freezing.

Set the container holding the rose aside, then add your estimated amount of prepared soil to the bottom of the hole and water lightly. Now you may take the rose out of the container and set it in the hole. Add the amended soil, tamping it down firmly with your hands and watering gently every few inches until the soil is level with the ground.

Fertilize very lightly with a balanced N-P-K fertilizer, then water again. Add three inches of mulch, a water irrigation line (if using one), and water again. Water well every other day the first week. Then apply a total of one inch of water per week, divided among three waterings.

Lastly, do not let our warming climate deter you. Seek out the newer, drought tolerant roses. Nursery websites selling roses will list whether a rose is drought tolerant and disease resistant. These roses still need moderate water while they are establishing themselves, but they need less water after maturing.

As with any cherished recipe, keep these instructions close at hand, in your favorite gardening book or attached to the inside of your kitchen cabinet door. You will be ready to plant when the roses arrive at our plant nurseries on Mother's Day weekend!

Carol Chicci, a Master Gardener with Coconino Cooperative Extension, has grown roses in Phoenix for 15 years and for 19 years in Flagstaff. She is a member of the Denver Rose Society, the American Rose Society, and the Durango Botanic Gardens.