

10 Stupid Things... .. gardeners do to mess up their rose garden

by Carolyn Elgar

Everyone makes mistakes. To err is human. So as much as any gardener refuses to admit it, you can bet they have done something stupid in their rose garden. Comfort yourself with the knowledge that everyone, even the most conscientious rose lover, has made one of these mistakes at some point in their history with roses.

1. *Buy too many.*

If you truly love roses, you have definitely done this. You read about a new variety or see an incredibly healthy rose at a nursery. "I can find a place," you say. Oops! When you get home and look around, you have to face the realization that, unless you tear up more of your lawn, there is no more room for one, not even a little one, rose bush in your garden. If you persist and sneak the newbie into the ground between two established roses or in front of a large bush you will pay the price. Mildews and rust will enjoy the increased humidity of all that foliage. Plus the young, new rose will have to fight for its share of water and fertilizer.

2. *Throw away the label.*

This can happen in a number of ways. The label may fall off in the car. You may cut off a wired label that seems to be adversely affecting a cane's health. And finally the name of the rose may be printed on the pot it came in and that pot disappears after you plant or repot the rose. However it happens, if you collect a number of rose varieties, there is a very good chance you will forget what they are. At the very least, you will have to be available in the garden whenever you entertain, because someone will want to know the name of that mystery rose.

3. *Forget to check for dryness.*

Whether it's in a pot or the ground, a dry rose is not a happy rose. Unfortunately, you may not get the message until it is too late. Sprinkler heads can break and rabbits love to chew through drip hoses. Before you know it, you've got a rose that is yellow, wilted, and on its way to the great rose garden in the sky.

4. *Forget to deadhead.*

If you want a bush to bloom again, the best way to ensure this is to cut off the flowers when they have dropped their petals or look blown out, before seeds form. If you do, the bush will once again attempt to create seed by producing a bloom. We may love our rose blooms, but the fact is, their primary purpose is to make new roses from the seed they produce. Don't let them and they will bloom again.

5. *Plant a big rose in a small space.*

In all fairness, you may not realize that the charming little Graham Thomas or Eureka rose bush you brought home from the nursery will grow to dwarf its neighbors. Or you may try to convince yourself that it won't get that big in your yard. But time is a cruel mistress. In two or three years that rose will be crossing the boundaries you set for it, creating a menacing shadow for the roses around it.

6. *Plant a rose in the shade.*

"How many hours of sunshine do my roses need?" asks little Miss Rose Lover. At least six hours for optimum bloom is the correct answer. Oh, but you don't have a sunny place left in your garden? Plant it in the shade and it will bloom, but the flowers will be small and the stems spindly. Lack of heat will encourage mildew and other rose diseases. Sure, some roses will do ok in the shade – but just ok.

7. *Starve your roses.*

The first flush of bloom can be an exhausting experience for your roses. To bloom as well again, they will need some help in building up food sugars that give them the energy they need. No matter what kind of roses you have, they will greatly appreciate a little fertilizer. At the very least, put down some time-release granules every four weeks during the blooming season. Once again, unfertilized roses will produce blooms that are ok – but nowhere near as hearty as they were at the beginning of the season.

8. Use your above ground sprinkler system at night or early in the morning.

The longer a rose's leaves stay wet, the more susceptible it is to invading fungi and bacteria. Warm sun will speed drying of the foliage. Run your sprinklers just before the sun comes up or afterwards.

9. Buy a rose you don't understand.

Different rose varieties have different characteristics. It's best for you and the bush if you know something about rose classifications and their growth habit. For example, if you want roses primarily for cutting, you may be happier with a hybrid tea than a floribunda. Many old garden roses only bloom once during the season; if you want repeat flowering, these will disappoint you. A climbing rose will put out long canes that need support, a frustrating situation for the gardener who wants a tidy bush. Also, it's good to know something about a plant's growth habit when it's time for pruning.

10. Leave things a mess.

No one likes to clean up a garden bed when it's hot outside or when there's something more pleasant to do. But insects and disease love the dark, humid covering of fallen leaves. Plus, dead leaves can be infected with fungi that will spread to other plants. Remove all dead foliage, canes, and flowers and put them in the green waste for disposal, not in your compost pile. Spores can live a long time on plant tissue, dead or alive.

There you have it. If you haven't done at least one of these things at some point in your gardening experience, then you aren't a true rose lover. The more you love roses, the more roses you want. The more roses you have, the higher the odds are that you will slip and commit one of these crimes. The good news is, roses are pretty forgiving if you can make things right again for them quickly.