

Rose Gardening Made Easy

Two Vital Words Site and Variety

Roses grow best with plenty of soil moisture but minimal wet foliage. When leaf surfaces remain wet a good part of the day, fungi "germinate". Fungal diseases appear as black spots, powdery residues, or both. If conditions persist, they damage the tissue, causing leaf drop. This does not kill the plant but does inhibit vigor. Here in the eastern United States we have to deal with rain, excess humidity and dew: all big contributors to wet foliage. But we can make rose growing easy if we remember two vital words: site and variety.

A Proper Site

- Choose a Proper Site - Sun and breezes chase dew away, so look for sites with maximum exposure. "Full sun" is preferable. Placed in the woods, crammed in a garden or jammed against a house isn't "full sun". Wide open areas where sun hits early in the morning and stays in full view until late in the day, is "full sun". This isn't always possible, but make that your goal.
- Keep the Proper Site Proper - Don't cancel out a site's assets by undoing its sun and air flow. Space plants with some breathing room. Before installation, learn how wide the variety grows then make allowances for light and air space. For example, if the variety grows 3-4' wide, plant them 5-6' apart. Obey this recommendation on a by-variety basis.

Proper site selection is easy. Plant Roses in uncrowned, open, sunny areas.

Better Varieties

Select varieties that naturally fight diseases. How? Choose from a system that identifies the best disease fighters. At Hasslefree® Headquarters in New Jersey we've been testing Roses for years. Our quest is disease resistance. Our normal conditions are high humidity and daily dew (a happy home for diseases, so this is a good testing ground). Here's how we do our research. We purchase sample lots of the new rose varieties coming into the marketplace. We plant them then water them daily by overhead sprinklers and avoid spraying them. In other words, we do nothing to help them, and we attempt to make them self-destruct. Most varieties contract disease quite readily under such treatment. Occasionally, we find a variety that puts up a better fight, maybe not perfect, but much better than others in its class. It is these tough fighters that we place into the Hasslefree Rose® brand. We are not the only disease testers. A few other companies attempt it, too. My point is, a good testing system that identifies the better varieties can save you from wasting time and money. Be choosy. Base your rose choices from some kind of system that identifies varieties with superior disease resistance. All that said, here is a short guide to help you make some better choices. You won't go wrong with these

- The Knockout® Series and its offspring - The Knockouts have excellent disease resistance. Look for Knockout, Pink Knockout, Blushing Knockout, Double Knockout, Rainbow Knockout, and so on. Many of Knockout's offsprings (some of which do not carry the Knockout name) are also fantastic disease fighters. Home Run is a marvelous example.
- Rugosa Roses - These are also classified as Seaside and Cottage Roses. They have a natural resistance to diseases. As a sidebar, they are also more deer resistant than other roses. Look for these varieties: Hansa, Moje Hammarberg, Blanc Double de Coubert, Linda Campbell, Therese Bugnet and Topaz Jewell.
- Shrub Roses - Most of the Meidiland® series: in our experience the best are Scarlet Meidiland, Fire Meidiland, Panda Meidiland and Magic Meidiland. Other clean shrub roses to look for are Carefree Delight, Carefree Wonder, Chuckles, Lady Elsie May, Pretty Lady, Rockin Robin, and What A Peach.

Finally

We can't stop the rain but we can do our part to minimize wetting of the foliage. If you use overhead or side throwing sprinklers have them turn on early in the day to allow plenty of time for foliage to dry before nightfall. Better yet, use a drip system or a soaker hose that drops water right at ground level. If you water by hand, set the nozzle at the plant's base and adjust the volume to low and slow so the soil gets saturated without a bunch of splashing onto the foliage. As always, water early in the day so if the foliage gets damp it has time to dry. If you run into a problem (and it's likely during extended cool, dewy, damp conditions), your garden outlet can provide quick, inexpensive solutions, often in organic formulations if that is your preference. Remember: Site and Variety. Now you're the neighborhood rose expert!