

Spare the pruning and spoil the roses

Although the idea of cutting off seemingly healthy branches and shoots from a growing rose plant may seem unnecessary or unnatural, pruning is a time-tested gardening practice which will improve the quality of your rose bushes and the appearance and size of the remaining blossoms.

Unpruned rose plants can produce too many branches or "canes" which can become entangled, twisted or shriveled, at the expense of their blossoms.

Pruning requires specialized cutting tools, including a fine-toothed saw for woody tissue, pruning shears and long-handled topping shears, as well as gloves and "pruning paint" to seal off large cuts. It also requires different techniques and timing for different varieties of rose plants.

Bush roses — probably the most common variety — should be pruned after the last frost but before new buds and leaves develop. Cuts should be made diagonally — 45-65 degrees — and at specific points on the plant. Secondary branches should be lopped off at the point where they emerge from the cane, and full canes at their base.

CUTS CAN also be made 14-inch above a "bud's eye" on branches, the point from which replacement growth emerges or just above a leaf with five leaflets. These types of cuts will ensure reblossoming buds.

The degree of pruning determines the eventual size of the remaining rose bush and blossoms.

Heavy pruning results in only three or four remaining canes less than a foot

high and is used mainly to produce show-quality roses. For general gardening purposes, light-to-moderate pruning is recommended, leaving a dozen or so canes at a height of two-to-four feet.

Pruning should start with the removal of all dead wood down to the first healthy, dormant bud as well as the

elimination of "suckers" — shoots which emerge below the bud union, the point at the base of the bush where the canes come together.

Weak or deformed branches should also be removed, including "dog legs" — canes that grow horizontally and then curve upward — and canes which emerge toward the center of the bush. Additional thinning is a matter of individual judgment, depending on how full and tall

the gardener wants the plant to be.

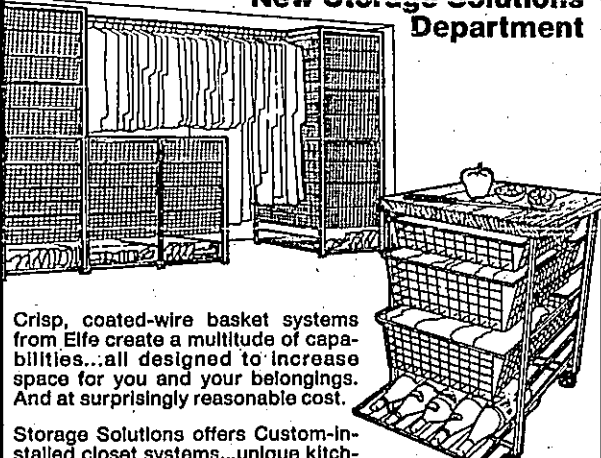
A saw should be used to cut the thickest branches at their base; long-handled shears come in handy for hard-to-reach canes, and the pruning shear is a good all-around tool for thinning smaller branches.

In any case, pruning paint should be applied to all but the smaller cuts in order to heal the wound and keep out insects and diseases.



The "five-leaflet" rule is a great thing to keep in mind when pruning your rose bushes or plants. Making cuts just above a growth with five leaflets will guarantee a reblossoming bud.

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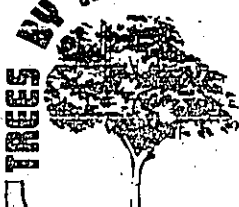
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