

Preparing a perfect planting environment for Roses

I have been asked a lot lately about what I do and how I plant my roses, especially when others see how big and healthy they grow.

Before getting into my planting medium and process, I want to list the ways roses can be planted.

First is in containers and pots. These should never be in contact with the ground. I set our pots on a concrete stepping stone. This keeps the ants out and the roots in the pots. Another thing I do is paint the exterior of the pot with an Exterior Latex off-white paint. This keeps the roots much cooler and require less watering. I also suggest using a fiberglass screen over the drainage holes; this helps keep the soil from flushing through.

Second is planting on a berm or in raised beds. Either way, water will pass through the root zone quickly so regular watering is essential to maintain optimal growth. Raised beds are my first choice for Hybrid Teas, Floribundas and Large Minifloras. I find these will perform better than in containers or in the ground. Raised beds soil stays looser, better aerated and retains moisture and the nutrients as well.

The third way is directly in the ground. The issue I find with this in Florida is that a large area should be worked up and conditioned, especially if Fortuniana grafted roses are being planted. They will require at least a five-foot circle worked up and conditioned. This is due to the way Fortuniana roots grow. They seldom grow deeper than twelve inches, but will grow laterally as far as eight feet from the plant center, so larger growing space is suggested for optimal success. The soil around the plantings will stay hard and compacted. This condition will deprive the soil of good drainage and nutrients washing away, not penetrating to the root zone. We do have a few climbers that are directly planted in the ground, but the soil was re-worked in a huge area. They do very well due to the extra work of the planting site.

Now getting to how I mix the planting soil and how I plant the roses. The soil mix pertains to all growing methods mentioned above. I start my mix using a large 12 cubic foot cart on wheels. The mix is made up of 40% top soil, 40% Miracle Grow Pro Potting soil and 20% Perlite, ground pine bark and alfalfa meal, these equal parts of each make up the last 20%. Mix these thoroughly.

When planting in either containers, raised beds or in the ground, start by filling the planting hole 4 to 5 inches with the suggested mix. Spread a ¼ cup of Triple Super Phosphate, ½ cup of Milorganite and a 1/8 cup of Osmocote 15-9-12 in the bottom of the hole. Add another 1" layer of mixed soil over these nutrients. Place the plant in the hole so the top is approximately an inch or two above your desired finished level. Start back filling the hole around the plant, lightly packing soil evenly with a couple shovels full at a time. When the hole is all but 3 inches full, pour 3 gallons of water in to settle the soil. Then add another ½ cup of Milorganite, ¼ cup of Osmocote and 1/3 cup of 10-10-10 granular fertilizer with minors around the plant. Then adding the last 3 inches of soil lightly packed. Mulch the area with medium size pine bark and water again. I suggest watering 2 or 3 more times within the first 8 hours.

I have been asked, why I use so much top soil. I am a firm believer that the natural nutrients and minerals found in a good top soil is unbeatable. These are not in the soilless mixes, neither is the sandy loam that has been recommended by so many top growers. Don't forget to use some sort of organic feeding when starting off our new plants. It should be applied 3 to 4 weeks after planting. Ralph's Organics has just the right amount of elements that makes for an excellent organic blend. Ralph's Organics can be found on the DSD website.

This process sounds like a lot of work, but after doing it a couple of times, this process becomes simple and second nature in time. Keep your plants well-watered, sit back and look for the miracles to start.

Good luck and happy growing.

Ralph Stream – ARS Master CR and Region 3 Director