

# Greater Lansing Rose Society



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## Growing Roses in cooler regions.... Like Michigan

Roses sometimes have a reputation of being finicky.... Thrilling for a time when first planted, then fading over the next few years. A few simple practices will help you grow beautiful roses year after year.

### 1) **Location:** Full sun, decent drainage

Roses need at least 6 hours of direct sunlight to do their best. While roses can tolerate clay soil, this can lead to water-logged and rotting roots which few plants will enjoy. Also avoid putting roses within the reach of tree roots as the trees will out compete the roses for water and nutrients causing you to fight a losing battle with mighty oaks (or maples or other giants). Take note of the type of soil in your garden. Clay retains nutrients but can become hard-packed and difficult to work if conditions are very wet or very dry. Sandy soil is easy to work, but moisture and nutrients quickly leach away. Your garden conditions will dictate how your plants should be fed and watered.

### 2) **Fertilize:** Twice a year at least.

A good rule of thumb is twice-a-year shot of fertilizer consisting of a blend of 2 parts 12-12-12 general purpose fertilizer with 1 part Milorganite. Here in central Michigan, I apply once in mid-May when growth is well underway in spring and again in mid-July. (Do not fertilize after the first half of September as this will encourage new growth which will just get whacked with hard frost.) Use gardening "common sense" and avoid getting the fertilizer on the leaves (it can burn) and water well after application. I've also used "Rose Tone," an organic fertilizer, applying one cup per plant once a month May 1 through September 1.... but the 12-12-12 /Milorganite is cheaper. For best results, get your soil tested to determine any deficiencies. (Search the internet for "garden soil test labs" and you'll find a number of options such as Michigan State University.)

### 3) Look out for **fungus** among us.

This is the point that often trips up rose growers and in my experience establishing **a regular fungus treatment/preventative spray program is the single most important consideration** for growing beautiful roses in areas like Michigan that can have humid summers. When our nights start to get warm and humid (usually early/mid July), conditions are ideal for fungal growth. This is biggest problem in my rose garden: fungal disease, especially black spot. As the name would imply, black spots appear on the lower leaves and before you know it, leaves yellow and fall off, leaving the bottom  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the plant ugly bare sticks. This generally doesn't kill the plant but who wants ugly twigs when you're trying for beautiful flowers? Without leaves, the plant can't produce much in the way of growth or new buds, so you're pretty much done until weather cools in the fall and fungus pressure fades, only to start all over again the next summer. Solution: Treat your roses with fungicide every two weeks starting July 1 (before black spots start to appear). I recommend a combination of two different (compatible) fungicides because you want to be sure to whack the fungus completely rather than part-way, which can lead to fungus becoming resistant. Here's a handful of fungicides you can consider:

Propiconazole ("Banner Maxx" and similar)

Captan

Flint (quite expensive, but requires very low dosage)  
Cleary 3336F (also, just "3336F Turf & Ornamental fungicide")  
Daconil (Chlorothalonil)  
Mancozeb

Some can be found at big box stores (Lowe's, Home Depot) or farm supply (TSC, Rural King, Farm & Home) or on-line (Amazon or sites specializing in landscape supplies like Do-My-Own or Keystone Pest Solutions). Sometimes you can search for the active ingredients and find off-brands that are significantly cheaper. Whatever you use, do a little research in terms of compatibility, how fungicides work, what causes fungicide resistance and most importantly READ THE DIRECTIONS and follow them to protect yourself and the environment.

#### 4) Be **selective with the roses you are trying to grow.**

There are literally thousands of rose varieties available since roses grow in regions as diverse as the cold upper Mid-west and Canada all the way down to sunny Florida and the tropics. But that's not to say that all roses will grow anywhere. Far from it! Some roses will do just fine in Minneapolis but that same plant may under perform in the heat of the Gulf Coast. How to know what will do well for you? Buy locally and ask local growers what plants are best suited for your area. Sure you can buy from Texas or California, or from Big Box that buys their stock from far off locations, but they may disappoint.

#### 5) Prune your plants in early spring/late winter.

Just like teenagers benefit from a good trim, so your roses need a good haircut. Even varieties well-suited for our area will have some winter die-back. The tips of canes – or even a few feet – will get nipped by harsh winter cold and drying winds. Cut these back to an outward-pointing bud. Canes that are rubbing should be thinned (pick the healthiest, prune the thinner/weaker) and just give the shrub a general clean-up to give it a nice shape and keep it in bounds. I normally prune in late February/early March when we get our first few 40 or 50 degree days and the first few sprouts start to appear.

#### 6) **Winter protection.**

Opinions vary widely on this topic. I know some very accomplished rose growers that have elaborate procedures for preparing their plants for winter. I have nearly 200 plants plus a couple of acres of other plants including fruit trees, grapes and lots of perennials (not to mention a wife, kids and grandkids) that are not all that keen to allow the roses to get all my attention. So I do not winter protect established plants. I let them go into winter dormancy with no special care and rarely lose any plants. The most punishing winters are cold ones with minimal snow cover, but even then it is rare for me to lose a plant entirely. I just prune back winter damage in spring, give 'em a shot of fertilizer when growth starts and they're blooming happily by June. That being said, I would encourage a little protection for first-year plants. Once the plants have gone into dormancy in late November, early December, a circle of fencing and a handful of leaves heaped around your babies should be enough to see them through their first winter.

#### 7) Pesky **insect pests.**

Roses, like many garden plants, can be an attractive snack for insect. I personally am not greatly opposed to chemical insecticidal treatments but have found that these are rarely needed (unlike fungicide which I highly recommend). Aphids (small yellow/green bugs) are usually the first to appear in the spring as they love to munch on new growth. Rather than reach for spray, I flick them off or give 'em a good spray from the hose. Next up are small green/brown worms that will enjoy chewing holes

in leaves. If you are alert and squish the first few that you find, you can generally prevent their establishment. Should they get out of hand, you can treat them with a variety of products such as Malathion, Sevin, or Imadicloprid, but some of these products are implicated in honey bee decline and of course you also risk whacking the friendly bugs that are the natural predators of the pesky bugs.

Once you get past these two threats, the real battle begins in mid-July when the Japanese beetles (JB's) come out to eat and "do-the-deed" on your roses. These are my mortal enemy in the rose garden! Whatever you do, DO NOT try the beetle-bag traps. I made that mistake and even when following directions to put them a ways out from your garden, they still managed to draw in hordes of beetles from all over the county. Just don't! Instead, keep an eye out for them and hand pick them by knocking them into a bucket of soapy water. (I use just plain water and then feed them to my chickens... their feeding frenzy is sweet revenge!) I also have found that planting a few sacrificial "Kiss Me Over the Garden Gate" (an annual that grows to about 6-8' tall) distracts the JB's from my roses and makes them easy to collect each morning/evening. Walk through your rose garden once a day in morning or evening and collect and destroy the JB's. If you'll keep up with this for about a month, you should have minimal damage from these pests.

A very accomplished grower I know on the west side of Michigan tells me he has very few JB's because he has put a handful of birdhouses around his garden to attract wrens and barn swallows which snatch JB's mid-air. I can vouch for this approach – I've had dramatically fewer JB's since putting up four bird houses and a jelly feeder for the orioles. Let the birdies do the work!

#### 8) Four-legged pests.

Here in mid-Michigan we have a lot of white-tailed deer. I live in a rural area and folks out here don't hesitate to shoot them (in season, of course) but my sons live 6 miles up the road in town and they regularly have small herds (sometimes as many as 10-15) moseying through their back or front yard munching on anything available. The neighbors and the cops frown on shooting them in town, so many resort to various sprays and repellants. I personally do not have time to be spraying every time it rains, so I use an electric fence. I have one that runs off of house electricity for those gardens close in, and I have a solar unit for some out-lying beds. Farm stores supply the fencers, poles, insulators, etc. that you'll need. I am a firm believer in zapping Bambi – he/she learns quickly to go somewhere else for a snack. I'll post more details on electric fencing in future.

Lastly, look into joining the American Rose Society ([www.rose.org](http://www.rose.org)). If you want to get serious about growing roses, the minimal cost of membership is money well spent. You can find a lot of good information and even connect with experienced rosarians in your area. The bimonthly magazine is also filled with beautiful photos and much useful information.



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