

# Success With Roses in Containers

**by Suzanne M. Horn, Master Rosarian**

## **ADVANTAGES**

### **Mobility & Less Commitment to Location**

A rose may do better in one place in your yard than in another. Planting roses in containers lets you evaluate it and then to easily move it to another location to find where it does best.

### **Reduced Competition**

No competing with other plants for nutrients, space & sunlight.

### **Reduced Soil Problems**

Fresh potting soil; new rose won't have to deal with any existing soil problems or bad drainage.

### **Easier Care**

Easier access to the bush for feeding, spraying & watering. Easier to isolate plants being treated for disease. Easier care for gardeners with physical limitations, since roses can be placed at convenient heights, reducing bending to ground level. See blooms closely with ease.

### **Faster Growth**

The warmth of the sun radiates around the sides of the pot, which stimulates fast root growth.

### **Creates Additional Space to Grow Roses**

Potted roses expand gardening space onto decks, balconies and patios.

### **Easier When Moving**

Container-grown roses can be easily repositioned. If you need move to a different residence or city you won't have to leave your roses behind.

### **Versatility**

Easier to change your garden design or landscape for different seasons or specific occasions.

## **DISADVANTAGES**

### **Repotting**

Roses must be repotted every three years since they become rootbound in pots.

### **More Frequent Watering**

More frequent watering is needed, most often by hand, since automatic watering systems require special design.

### **Extra Winter Protection in Cold Climates**

Containers require extra winter protection in the colder climates

# **SUGGESTED LOCATIONS**

## **Patio, deck, front porch, roof top, terraces, balcony.**

Note: Areas used at night – try white or pastel roses.

## **Wide walkways - highlight with containers of roses or tree roses.**

Tree Roses can become top heavy and can blow over in a heavy wind. Try layering the bottom of the pot with a few inches of pebbles to anchor it.

## **Scattered Throughout Your Garden**

Note: Otherwise known as the “Vanishing Lawn Syndrome” (Dr. Tommy Cairns)

## **Hanging Baskets**

Use miniature roses. Select a trailing variety to let the flowers cascade from tree limbs, overhangs, and brackets. \*\*Hanging baskets tend to dry out quickly, so use soil polymers and line container with sphagnum peat moss.

## **Steps to the front or back door**

## **Around swimming pool.**

The container gardener is limited only by his/her imagination.

## **Elevated Benches and Tables**

Stair-stepping minis on benches gives greatest access and best use of space.

## **Buried In The Ground**

Gives the illusion of being in the ground but protects from specific soil problems & tree roots.

## **Parkway**

Expands gardening area & delights passers-by. Bury in the ground. Try double-potting.

# **BAD LOCATIONS:**

## **Window boxes**

Those that are too small for root systems to develop & plants to grow.

## **In the shade.**

Roses need 5-6 hours of full sun a day, although some varieties tolerate less.

## **Under a tree.**

Limits access to sunlight.

## **Next to light colored walls.**

Excessive reflected heat & light may burn foliage.

## **Too Close to Another Rose.** (\*\*\*) Note: Do as I say, not as I do.)

Spacing between pots should be 3 feet on center or minimum 2 ½ feet on center for large roses.

# **CONTAINER SELECTION**

## **BASIC REQUIREMENTS**

Big enough to allow for proper root development  
Must provide good drainage – check to see it has drainage holes.  
Must have a wide enough base not to blow over in a strong wind!

## **TYPE OF CONTAINER**

### **Plastic Pots**

These are most economical, hold water best, stay coolest & last longest.  
They are lightweight, inexpensive, fairly durable and come in a variety of colors.

### **Wood pots**

Wood pots are more expensive, dry out quickly, and don't last as long. They tend to rot unless treated. Avoid wood treated with creosote or other toxic compounds since the vapors can damage the plants. One advantage of wooden containers is that they can be built to sizes and shapes that suit the location.

### **Ceramic & terracotta**

These pots are also popular. However, cheap terracotta leaches salt into soil, which is not good for the roses. Ceramic pots are decorative, but they are more costly.

### **Clay pots**

Clay pots are inexpensive, but are heavy, porous and tend to dry out quickly.

## **SIZES OF CONTAINERS**

Start minis in one or two-gallon pots where they can get off to a fast, healthy start.  
Roots will spread quickly from the warmth surrounding the outer edges of the small pot.  
Many start large bareroot roses in 5-gallon pots filled with a light potting soil for three to six months - gets them off to a fast start as warmth of the sun radiates around the sides of the pot, which stimulates fast root growth.

Large roses (hybrid teas, floribundas, shrubs, OGRs) will require at least a 15 gallon pot to accommodate their root systems. Some large varieties simply do better in the ground.

## **COLORS OF CONTAINERS**

Green, black, terracotta, white

In hot areas, try rose skirts - plain white, bottomless boxes to keep roots cooler  
(Info on rose skirts available on Santa Clarita Rose Society website)

## **WHERE TO PURCHASE**

Garden Centers, Home Depot or Lowes. New ones tend to be pricey.  
Buy used pots or wholesale in volume: Excellent source is Farrand Enterprises in Chino, CA

# **BEST SOIL CHOICE: SANDY LOAM**

- Fertile, well-drained soil containing clay, sand, & decomposed organic matter
- Crumbly texture holds together well and allows for penetration of air and water
- Absorbs & stores water readily for plants to use
- Don't mix sand & clay. You will get Cement!
- Purchase a good organic Potting Soil. Read the label for organic ingredients such as peat, worm castings, and perlite for good drainage.

## **OXYGEN**

- Oxygen in the soil is very important to good plant growth
- Soil structure is the single most important factor in allowing oxygen availability in the soil.

## **PHOSPHORUS & PLANT GROWTH**

- Essential nutrient - Stimulates root growth
- Hastens Plant Maturity/winter hardiness
- Produces Quality Plants with Big Blooms
- Roots grow to phosphorus/apply to root zone
- Available in four forms
  - Rock Phosphate
  - Superphosphate
  - Triple Superphosphate
  - Bone Meal

## **FEED YOUR SOIL – USE ORGANIC MATTER**

- Helps retain water, which is important for sandy soils
- Helps to lower pH in alkaline soil
- Slowly releases nutrients to the plant over time

# PLANTING ROSES IN CONTAINERS

## SUGGESTED INGREDIENTS:

**PEAT MOSS** - Put a 1-2” layer of peat moss in the bottom of the pot

**POTTING SOIL** (Gardener and Bloom, Supersoil, Uni-Grow)

Should be light, loose, sterile, have multiple organic ingredients

**PERLITE** - Mix with Potting Soil - I prefer about ¼ perlite.

**SUPERPHOSPHATE** or **BONE MEAL** - Place in planting hole.

**FISH MEAL** - use a light layer in lower half of the pot

**WATER HOLDING CRYSTALS/WATER POLYMERS**

Mix into soil or put light layer of polymer with the fish meal

**MYCORRHIZAE** – Optional for quicker initial root growth

**VITAMIN B-1, JUMP START** or **SUPERTHRIVE**

**MULCH** (Garden Center or Equestrian Center)

## MY POTTING METHOD:

Begin with a layer of peat moss (big roses) at the bottom.

Add a layer of the potting mix. (Commercial organic potting soil mixed with Perlite)

Poke a few spaces in the planting hole and fill with superphosphate or bone meal (1/4 cup with a large rose/ 1 Tbsp. with a mini). Cover with soil.

Add a light layer of Fish Meal and Water Holding Crystals/Polymer. Add another layer of potting mix. Try to keep the amendments (fish meal, etc.) from coming in direct contact with the roots to avoid burning new feeder roots.

Optional Growth Additive: Mycorrhizae – apply in direct contact with roots

If the plant is pot bound, carefully tease the roots apart and spread them out with your fingers. Then place the rose in the container and arrange the roots in a circle and then fill the container with the potting soil. Tamp down with fingers and water to settle the soil. Refill obvious holes with potting soil.

Work in a small amount of slow release organic fertilizer into soil.

Mulch with Gromulch, Wood chips, Shredded Bark or Horse Manure Mulch, and then pour on a gallon or so of water with B-1 and/or Superthrive or Jump Start.

## **PLANTING & TRANSPLANTING TIPS:**

- **Pots can be heavy and hard to move after they are full of soil. Work in or near the spot where your roses will rest. If you must move them, use a garden cart and lift with your knees.**
- **Cover the drainage hole in the pot with a square of window screen to help keep soil from washing out.**
- **Mulch with a one to two-inch layer of compost or bark to conserve moisture and keep weeds from sprouting in the container. Mulch also helps insulate roots from extreme weather.**
- **Anchor top-heavy roses with a stake for support in the container. Tall green tomato stakes from Home Depot, OSH or Lowes work well.**
- **If growing tree roses where gusty wind can topple them, fill the bottom third of lightweight pots with gravel for extra weight.**
- **Harden off roses, particularly minis, that come right from a greenhouse. Start in shades spot and gradually move into more sun over the period of about a week.**
- **Keep plants well watered for several weeks after potting or transplanting; locate in shady spot for about a week for extra protection from transplant shock if this is possible.**
- **Don't fertilize your potted or repotted roses for about 2 weeks, until after they settle in and start to rebound.**

## **REPOTTING**

- **Repot every 3 years, because roses become rootbound. Best time is during the cool months.**
- **Keep roses in the container until the roots have totally involved the medium. Then it can be easily removed from the pot with the root ball intact. If you remove it too soon, the soil will fall off the root ball, damaging the fibrous root system which initially develops.**

# **CARE & MAINTENANCE**

## **FEEDING TIPS**

**Fertilize potted roses twice as often as garden roses but at half strength.**

**Water roses well the day before feeding. If you feed a dry potted plant, you could burn the roots or kill the plant.**

**Add organic matter to the soil regularly. Helps break down fertilizer into a form it can use.**

**Feed fish emulsion in early spring to get roses off to a healthy start.**

**In spring, sprinkle a Tbsp. of Epsom Salts around the base of the plant. This provides the necessary magnesium for healthy foliage.**

### **EPSOM SALTS ADVANTAGES:**

- **Magnesium Sulfate**
- **Strengthens crown of the plant**
- **Stimulates new basal growth**
- **Magnesium promotes healthy foliage**
- **In spring and early fall, sprinkle around base of plant or add when feeding.**

### **ACCUMULATION OF SALTS IN SOIL:**

**Good Fertilizing will eventually cause a buildup of salts in the soil.**

### **EFFECT OF SALT BUILD-UP**

- **Interferes with water availability to roots.**
- **Less benefit from fertilizers applied.**
- **Suggested Remedy: Flush out salts once or twice a year with Clearex.**

# **WATER**

- **Container grown roses drain faster, need more frequent watering. No saucers.**
- **Mulch and soil polymers hold water longer.**
- **Time of Day ~ Watering in early morning or late afternoon reduces evaporation.**
- **Type of Soil ~ Different types of soils have different watering needs.  
Sandy soil = more frequent watering.  
Clay soil = less frequent watering.**
- **One deep watering is better than watering several times lightly.**
- **Deep water encourages roots to grow downward. Light watering encourages roots to grow toward top of pot, vulnerable to sun and elements.**
- **Roses need drainage to breathe. Don't let roses sit in standing water.**
- **Roses like air circulation and breathe through their leaves. Shower off foliage frequently in early morning ~ not late in day.**

# **THE WEATHER FACTOR**

- **Over 90 degrees: Water every day.**
- **80-90 degrees: Every other day.**
- **70-80 degrees: Every 3 days.**
- **60-70 degrees: Every 4 days.**
- **50-60 degrees: Every 5 days.**
- **Rain: Adjust schedule & Automatic timers if heavy rain occurs.**
- **High Winds dry out soil ~ Water more often.**