

“Caring for Roses with Organic Methods”
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Recipient of an Award of Merit from American Rose Society 2011
Excerpt printed in January/February 2012 issue of
American Rose, The Magazine of the American Rose Society

My mother embraced organic gardening in the 60's and I learned much of what I know about organic gardening from her. I subscribed to my own copy of “Organic Gardening” magazine when I had a home of my own and began my own garden. Vegetables, herbs, shrubs, trees and flowers filled my gardens, but there were no roses. Everyone knew roses could not be grown without the use of pesticides and fungicides. I learned about EarthKind Roses in 2002 when I attended Dr. Steve George's seminar. I received two roses at the end of the seminar, LaMarque and Country Dancer. Dr. George gave us instructions for preparing the soil and growing our roses. My roses were part of the EarthKind Rose Brigade and I sent reports to Dr. George on their progress. Neither has made the EarthKind list, yet, but they have performed well in my gardens. Dr. George gave us instructions for site selection, soil preparation and rose care. There were no pesticides or fungicides in his instructions. EarthKind Roses demonstrate superior pest tolerance and outstanding landscape performance. EarthKind Landscaping preserves and protects the environment.

I began planting EarthKind and antique roses in all my gardens and managed them organically. I planted a hedge of Knock Out roses next to one vegetable garden and Martha Gonzalez roses next to my other vegetable garden. Their flowers bring the pollinators, which is mutually beneficial to the vegetables.

Mike Shoup spoke last fall at a seminar in Farmer's Branch about his organic approach to growing roses. Mike Shoup is the owner of The Rose Emporium in Brenham, Texas. He told us about his secret for growing roses: VSPC- Variety, Site, Preparation, Care. He wrote about his organic approach in “Roses Come Clean” in the April/May 2010 issue of “Organic Gardening” magazine.

Dr. George and Mike Shoup stressed the same point: **Choose the Right Rose.** Species and shrub roses are better suited to organic methods. Dr. George tested hundreds of roses to come up with his list of 21 EarthKind Roses that could be grown with organic methods. Mike Shoup rustled roses from old cemeteries and abandoned homesteads, roses that thrived without

human care. He recommends that gardeners “choose rose varieties that are naturally vigorous, maintain them organically, and interplant them with diverse companions. Earth-Kind Roses include: Belinda’s Dream, Caldwell Pink, Carefree Beauty, Cecile Brunner, Climbing Pinkie, Ducher, Duchesse de Brabant, Else Poulsen, Georgetown Tea, Knock Out, La Marne, Madame Antoine Mari, Marie Daly, Mutabilis, New Dawn, Perle d’Or, Reve d’Or, Sea Foam, Souvenir de St. Anne’s, Spice and The Fairy. Mike Shoup lists additional roses that he recommends: Old Blush, Souvenir de la Malmaison, Marchesa Boccella, Penelope, Crespuscule and Stephen F. Austin.

Prepare a moisture retentive, well drained soil. Choose a site with at least 6 hours of full sun and good air circulation. Texas A&M research at the Richardson gardens demonstrated that proper soil preparation is paramount to growing roses successfully. Obtain a soil sample for testing to assess your soil. This can be done at the Extension office in Sherman. Roses love slightly acidic soil, which our native soil **IS NOT!** Clay soils need several inches of compost and a layer of expanded shale worked into the soil. I use cotton burr compost to reduce alkalinity. I also have an unending supply of donkey manure available and my roses love it. Sandy soil does not need the expanded shale, but will be greatly improved with the addition of compost. The benefits of compost are many: improves soil capacity to retain water, improves porosity and helps plants absorb nutrients.

Add a thick mulch to keep the roots cool and moist. Mike Shoup encouraged us to “embrace nature’s ways”. Plants in nature grow & thrive with an annual layer of mulch provided when deciduous plants drop their leaves in the fall. Mother Nature does not rake up the leaves, put them in plastic bags and haul them away to the dump! The nutrient rich leaves break down to provide not just N-P-K, but also the micronutrients plants need to thrive. Mike Shoup applies a 3” layer of mulch twice a year, in February and in September. Beneficial microbes break down the mulch, the same way they break down the leaves on the forest floor. The mulch provides another benefit as it covers spores, preventing them from splashing up on the roses during a rainstorm.

Healthy plants resist pests and disease. Diseases do occur on healthy roses that are grown with organic methods, but the roses do not succumb to the disease. Aphids and spider mites can be dispatched with a strong blast of water from a high-pressure hose. Leaves with black spot simply fall off as new, healthy leaves appear. Garlic tea sprayed on rose leaves, top and bottom, is a natural fungicide and pesticide. Practice good garden hygiene by removing the diseased leaves and avoiding over watering.

The March 2010 issue of “The Herb Companion” gives an organic treatment for black spot and powdery mildew.

For black spot: Prepare a mixture of one Tbsp baking soda and one Tbsp horticultural oil dissolved in one gallon of water. Remove the diseased leaves and spray the entire plant starting at the bottom.

For powdery mildew: Prepare a mixture with one part milk and nine parts water. Spray the entire plant from the bottom up to the top.

The 2010 Edition of “The Old Farmer’s Almanac Garden Guide” gives the following organic methods for disease and pest control:

For Black Spot: mix 3 Tbsp baking soda with one gallon water and spray on roses

For Spider Mites: mix ½ cup buttermilk and 4 cups wheat flour in 5 gallons of water. Strain through cheesecloth and discard the solids. Spray on mite infested plants.

I have used vinegar for an herbicide for many years and cannot remember where I first heard about it. A spray bottle filled with 5% vinegar eliminates weeds and grass.

The author of Carrots Love Tomatoes offers another recipe for the treatment of black spot: make a spray by placing tomato leaves in a food processor with 4 pints of water and one Tbsp of cornstarch. Strain the mixture and spray the roses. Tomato leaves contain solanine, a volatile alkaloid. This is another reason to plant tomatoes with roses. Prune the diseased rose leaves and discard them. Do not place them in a compost pile where they will multiply.

Steven Scanniello writes in A Year of Roses about his organic method of black spot control: “The safest and the healthiest method for controlling black spot is through pruning. Get rid of all infected parts. Remove the lower foliage 3-6” up from the ground, as well as twiggy growth, when the first flush of blooms fade. This is a wise preventative, since black spot starts in the lower regions of a rose bush”. And he also writes “Cut off all infected parts, bag them up and throw them into the trash. The best way to treat disease is through prevention. Keep your garden clean of all decay and remove any infected parts as soon as you suspect there might be a problem”. He also recommends “moving the roses to a new spot with better air circulation or consider getting rid of the problem rose and find a better suited variety”.

Companion planting adds diversity and encourages natural predators. Monoculture of roses invites disease and pests. Antique roses thrive in combination with perennials, annuals, shrubs and small trees. Mike

Shoup advises, “Don’t plant rose gardens, plant gardens that have roses in them”. A garden with year-round interest can be created with companion plantings: tulips, daffodils and scabiosa bloom in the spring; roses bloom from spring to first frost; chrysanthemums and salvia add fall color; rosemary, parsley and hellebores provide evergreen color through winter. Pay attention to culture requirements and growth habits of the companion plants. Some perennials and herbs will attract beneficial insects and repel bad ones. The birds and butterflies that fly in an organically grown, diverse garden add more color and interest.

Some companion plants and their benefits:

- All alliums (onions, garlic, chives, scallions) help protect roses against black spot, mildew, aphids, spider mites and other detrimental bugs
- Tomatoes protect roses from black spot
- Rosemary, parsley and basil are good companions for roses

Add a bench to your garden and sit back to enjoy the sights, scents and sounds of your garden with roses grown with organic methods.

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