

Rose Pruning – Spring 2025

Sally Newbrook, RHS Rosemoor Curatorial Team Leader

Autumn

Our rose maintenance season starts towards the end of October when we shorten shrub and bush roses back by around a third to prevent wind rock. We do this with secateurs or shears for more robust varieties. New growth on climbers and ramblers is roughly tied in with string to prevent damage in the windy months – you can fully prune these in the autumn but we find it easier to access them when all leaf has dropped and other herbaceous has been cleared.

Pruning

We start rose pruning in December and are finished by early March. With over 2000 rose plants we have to start early but where possible February is the ideal month to prune. Pruning lessens the chances of disease, encourages lots of healthy growth for a good floral display and keeps the roses from outgrowing their space.

You will need:

- a pair of secateurs,
- a small pruning saw for dealing with bigger stems at the base of the rose
- thick gloves (leather or equivalent)

Keeping your tools sharp will make the job easier and produce a clean cut that will heal more quickly. We also clean ours between each variety with disinfectant to prevent spreading disease.

Basic pruning guidance (see below for type specific info):

- First take out anything dead, damaged or diseased to leave behind healthier stems – cut back to healthy growth or take to the base if that is not an option.
- The aim of pruning is to create an open centre and nicely spaced stems that point out from the base. With this in mind, take out the stems that may impair the flowering potential of others, for instance smaller stem crossing other healthier ones.
- If you have several old unproductive stems then now is the time to take them out from the base but don't leave yourself with nothing!
- Once you have reduced your pruning options, prune the remaining stems to an outward facing bud at the required height – cutting at a 45° angle sloping away from the bud.

Pruning Hybrid Tea Roses





Hopefully you will have some thick healthy shoots coming from the base:

- Shorten these to as little as 10-15cm from the ground (leave 4-6 buds).
- Cut side shoots to 2-3 buds.
- Use a saw to remove any stems 3yrs and older leaving only the more vigorous growths that will produce better flowers.

Pruning Floribundas



These are similar to HT but have more branching stems and aren't pruned as hard so as to support their clusters of flowers

- Prune the strongest shoots to 25-30cm above soil level.
- Spur back healthy side shoots to 2-3 buds and remove spindly ones.
- Prune any smaller stems back a bit harder or if really weak to a 2.5-5cm above ground level.

Shrub roses



Repeat-flowering shrub roses are a diverse group but generally need lighter pruning than HTs and Floribundas as they tend to flower from older wood.

- It's important to have a balance of new and old wood – healthy new stems can be shortened to about half their full length.
- Side shoots on older stems are cut back (spurred) to 2-3 buds.
- 20-30% of old wood can be sawn out at the base.

Once-flowering shrub roses such as Gallicas, Albas, Damasks, Moss and species can be pruned in late summer. However here we give leggy growth a trim with shears in summer to keep them compact and then complete the pruning in winter. This way it is a lot easier to see which stems would be appropriate to remove as leaves have dropped plus you can keep the shorter flowering stems for their hips over autumn and winter.

- As a general rule remove about a third of the old stems to encourage the plant to regularly produce new stems.
- Shorten and spur back lightly depending on the vigour of the rose (most material will have been removed with shears already after flowering).

Ramblers and Climbers



Ramblers can be pruned directly after flowering, although this may be difficult if the rambler is grown with a late flowering clematis, which most of ours are, in which case the pruning is postponed to the dormant season. They flower best on new growth, so it is important for the plant to produce new healthy stems on a regular basis.

- Firstly, detach all the stems from the support and lay them out on the floor so as to identify those that you wish to keep and those that can be cut out from the base.
- If it has not produced many new stems then keep some of the old healthy and better-placed stems to cover the support – you are aiming for good even coverage.
- Cut back side shoots to 2-3 buds and old flowering stems to the next healthy bud.

Climbers differ from ramblers in that they tend to flower from much older wood and stems are replaced at a much slower pace.

- Once you've covered the basics (DDD, crossing stems) prune flowered side shoots back to 2-3 buds and tie in new stems.
- If there are new healthy stems consider using them to replace old ones (saw out at base).



