



the iowa gardener

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Tips for Great Roses in Iowa

Plant easy roses

This is the best advice by far and avoids much work and heartache! See the accompanying handout or log on to <http://theiowagardener.com> and check out our listing in our articles section.

Seek out own-root roses when possible

Most rose plants you buy are actually two roses. The top part is the fancy part, grafted on to the roots of a super-tough rose. Together, they make a rose with tough roots on the bottom and pretty flowers on the top. However, the top part is less vigorous, and may die out over the winter. Own-root roses are harder to find, but are more winter-hardy. If they die back to the root, it doesn't matter.

Avoid hybrid tea roses

These have been called the most expensive annual you can buy. Although touted as cold-hardy to Zone 5 (the southern half of Iowa), even in southern Iowa they're iffy, lasting some winters and dying out in others. Unfortunately, hybrid teas are sold all over the state and touted as truly winter-hardy. They're also magnets for Japanese beetles, a new pest in Iowa. Some rose retailers will hate me for saying it, but I recommend you pass on any hybrid tea rose.

Plant roses in sun

Plant roses where they'll get plenty of sun, especially this far north where the sun is less direct. I'd recommend roses get 10 or more hours of direct, unfiltered light a day—not just 8 as so often is recommended. Morning sun is best, by far. It dries off morning dew quickly to prevent fungal diseases.

Compost

At planting time, work in several spades of compost into the soil. Compost is magic, improving texture, fertility, and overall soil health in wonderfully intricate ways.

Wait to prune

In spring, don't prune too early. I like to wait until the leaf buds are a half inch or so long so I know more precisely what's dead and what's not.

Plant deep

Plant the graft or bud union (the knobby part right above the roots) 1 to 2 (yes, 2!) inches below the soil level. Some national companies will tell you to plant the graft union at ground level, but in Iowa, go deeper. It protects the rose from harsh winters.

Feed them

Fertilize roses 2 to 3 times during the growing season. Fertilize the first time in early spring, just as the plants are starting new growth. Fertilize again at bloom time in early June. Fertilize one more time, if desired, in early July.

If you choose to use chemicals, consider a combination rose fertilizer-insecticide. Bayer makes an excellent one in a big blue jug. I also like Osmocote, a slow-release granular fertilizer that's easy to apply. Otherwise, fertilize with any chemical or organic fertilizer, and if it's made for roses, so much the better.

But don't overfeed your roses

Always stop feeding roses in early August (a tip from Reiman Gardens' Nick Howell). This prevents tender new growth that will get zapped by winter.

Spray for mildew

Spray all but rugosa roses with a mixture of 2 tablespoons baking soda, 1 tablespoon liquid soap, and 2 quarts water. Do this three times, 10 days apart, in early spring before daytime temperatures hit 80 degrees. This will prevent powdery mildew.

Brace for winter

In fall, mound all your roses (except the rugosas—they don't need it) with compost or good-quality soil after the first frost to a depth of 8 inches or more. But I'd not bother with wrapping and certainly not with those white cones, which may do more harm than good. Plus, they're really, really unattractive. Gently push away the soil in spring when new growth starts.