Winterizing Roses

Now that the temperatures have been getting colder, it’s time to think about preparing your landscape for the winter months. Most shrub roses are hardy to our Kansas winters, but a few types of roses could have problems adjusting to our winters. For example, the hybrid tea roses have certain species in their ancestry that originated in the warm climate of southern China. These roses need protection to survive Kansas winters. One way to help protect your roses is by mounding the soil about eight to ten inches high around each plant. When using soil, bring it in from another location. You do not want to pull from a part that has disease problems. Do not pull it from in-between plants because this can damage the roots or make them more susceptible to the cold.

Mounding is normally done by Thanksgiving. After the ground has frozen, add a 4-inch layer of mulch. The mulch can be made up of straw, leaves, or hay for further protection. A small amount of soil may be spread on top of the mulch to keep it in place. Do not add the mulch before the ground freezes or mice may invade and feed on the roses over the winter. The purpose of these coverings is not only to moderate the cold but also to prevent warm days during the winter or early spring from stimulating growth that is tender to returning cold weather.

If your roses have excessively tall canes they can be pruned to a height of 36 inches or tied together to prevent them from being whipped by strong winter winds. Wind can cause major damage to the crown of the plant by loosening the surrounding soil. Next spring, remove coverings from the crown before new growth starts. Wait until after the ground thaws, as the temperatures are more consistent. If you remove the coverings too soon the tops may begin growing before the roots can provide water to the new growth. If you have any questions feel free to stop by or contact me in the Washington office, 785-325-2121 or khatesohl@ksu.edu.

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