Pruning Roses

Climbing, Hybrid, & Knockout

Climbing Roses-

First and foremost, a good rule of thumb for pruning climbing rosebushes is to not prune them for two or three years, thus allowing them to form their long arching canes. Some die back pruning may be required but hold it to a minimum! The two or three years is a “training time” for you to keep them trained to a trellis or other feature of your garden; keeping them tied back and growing in the desired direction early on is of the highest importance. Not doing so will cause you much frustration in trying to train the rosebush to go where you want it to once it has grown truly out of control. Once it is time to prune a climbing rose bush, I wait until their new foliage has come on well enough that they show me where to prune them back. Pruning some climbing roses too soon will greatly diminish the blooms one gets for that season, as some bloom on the previous year’s growth or what is known as the “old wood.”

After the initial training of your climbing rose, subsequent maintenance will generally involve a yearly pruning each spring, as well as regular deadheading of spent blossoms. Each year before the plant leaf’s out in spring, trim the rose's shoots, so only a few nodes extend past the major structural canes. Secondary shoots that flowered amply the previous year should be cut back by about two-thirds to promote more blooms. Also, refasten the major canes to the structure if they have loosened. Continue to check that everything is securely fastened throughout the year, so no damage to the plant or structure occurs. Should you find that an old major cane has stopped producing, this can be removed entirely, replaced with a new cane with plenty of fresh green growth

Hybrid Roses-

 Prune hard in late winter, while the rose is still dormant. Once canes begin to sprout new stems you’ve lost your window. You can still prune but expect less vigor from the rose that season.

Step 1: Prune Dead Wood it fosters decay and will never give you blooms. Thus, it is the first to go when you start pruning. Dead wood is brown and looks dry and lifeless. Try and cut back dead wood flush where it is connected to living wood. You may have to turn your bypass pruners or loppers upside down to get a clean cut.

Step 2: Remove Canes to Open Up the Center of the Plant Pruning Hybrid Tea roses. After. Air circulation is important to rose and stems crossing through the center of the plant are bad news for your lovely plants. Stuffy conditions in the heart of the plant are an open invitation for all sorts of damaging rose diseases. To deny these dastardly fungi a place of refuge, remove stems that cross through the center of the plant. You want the plant to have a vase-like shape where the canes bow out from the center instead of a crossing thicket of spindly stems. Notice in the before and after diagram above how the center of the plant is free of crossing branches. This is what you want your plants to look like when you done pruning.

Step 3: Remove Weak Wood Weak wood has no place on a rose bush. You want to remove any wood that is thinner than the width of a pencil (I’m sorry if I brought back bad high school standardized test memories). Prune out weak and twiggy wood. This stuff never blooms well and saps energy from the plant without any return on your rose garden investment. You are the pruning drill sergeant. Get this rose in to shape for the blooming season ahead. To paraphrase a Marine Corps gardening drill sergeant, pruning is just weak wood leaving the body!

Step 4: Prune the Remaining Canes Make final pruning cuts above an outward facing bud. Now that you pruned out the dead and weak wood and anything that looked a diseased, it is time to shorten the overall length of the canes that remain. These are the few and the proud that will bloom their hearts out for you this spring. We need to treat them well by shortening them to be 18 to 24 inches long. When you make your final cut, it is important to prune 1/4 to 1/2″ above an outward facing cut. You have the power to shape the plant and determine how it will grow. The bud below your cut is the bud that will produce this spring’s shoots. If you select a bud that faces towards the inside of the plant, it will grow the wrong way. The photo above shows what a dormant growth bud looks like. Make a 45-degree angled cut above this bud.

Step 5: Remove All Remaining Foliage Now that you have pruned your favorite hybrid tea rose to its final form, remove any stubborn leaves that still cling to the stems. Your plant is dormant and does not need the foliage now. These leaves, if left on the plant, will certainly harbor fungal spores and insect pests that will surely attack your plants come spring. Deny these pests a place of refuge by removing the leaves. Good sanitation is important for growing roses since they are prone to disease. Clean up and dead flowers, leaves and rose clippings under the plants and dispose of them in the garbage. DO NOT compost rose waste as it can serve as a source of reinfestation for fungal diseases.

Knockout Roses

Here is the complete process explained in detail on how to prune knockout roses:

1. Remove Dead, Diseased or Damaged Wood.

Use pruning shears to cut out dead wood and canes that have died back or are severely damaged. Make the cuts just above a bud or node, where there is new growth.  
For Knockout roses, it’s best to prune before they bloom in the spring.

2. Step 2

2. Remove any suckers that sprout from the base of the plant.  
These are shoots that grow out from the rootstock and should be removed as soon as they appear, so they don’t take energy away from the rest of the plant. Use pruning shears to cut them off at ground level.

3. Thin Out Canes So They Are Spaced 6 To 12 Inches Apart.

This will give your rose bush room to grow and help prevent disease problems in future years by allowing air circulation around all parts of the plant. It will also help you see where new growth is developing so you’ll know where to cut back in step 4 below

4. Prune After Flowering Ends for Knockout Roses.

This is when you want to remove any damaged canes (the bottom ones) and replace them with new growth (the top ones). Cut each cane off just above a bud or node, where there is new growth on either side of it. This way you won’t accidentally cut into a bud which will impact next year’s blooms!