



HERITAGE
ROSES
IN AUSTRALIA

Pruning Heritage Roses

Originally published in the
HRIA Sydney Group Newsletter May 2021
Edited by Susan Wade & Angela Morgan

Pruning Heritage Roses

*Information: largely by Trevor Nottle, internationally recognised authority on heritage roses
Formatting/added photos: Susan Wade*

General comments, as below, may be made regarding the pruning of roses.

- **Pruning Objectives:** Improve Air Circulation, Deadhead for Re-bloom, Shape/Maintenance, Remove Old Canes, Crossing Stems, Weak Wood and Dead, Damaged or Diseased Root Stock.
- **Pruning for health:** Basic rose pruning involves the 3 Ds: removing dead, damaged, or diseased branches.
- **Pruning cuts should be made just above a bud eye.** "Bud eye" refers to the area on the stem where branching occurs. In summer, it's easy to figure out where to prune, just cut right above a set of mature leaves.
- **Once-blooming roses:** Old garden roses that bloom only once a year produce flowers on old wood. This is growth that appears the year previous to any blooms it produces. Once-bloomers should only be pruned immediately after they finish flowering (generally early summer – around mid-December). If you prune in winter, you will lose all of that year's bloom. Old garden roses can be pruned to 15 inches every other year without damage. This keeps a large bush within bounds and provides shaping. If you don't mind the size of the bush, then only prune for dead, damaged, and diseased canes or other growth consider undesirable.

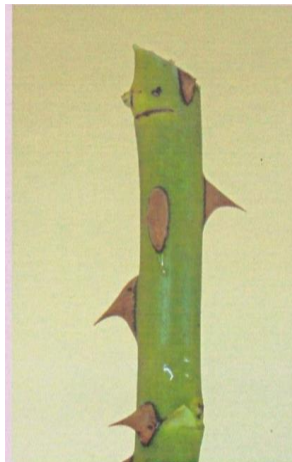
Reference for the above information: <https://www.heirloomroses.com/info/care/how-to/prune/>



Locating the dormant eye by looking for a small circular swelling pimple at the junction where a leaf once resided



Locating the dormant eye (stem rotated 90 degrees to accentuate the exact location of the spot)



Making that all important cut to promote the new growth in the correct direction away from the center of the bush



Emerging new growth after approx. 3-4 weeks providing stems bearing flowers

- **Repeat blooming or remontant roses:** Repeat blooming roses are pruned in mid-late winter (mid-July in Sydney/mid-August in colder areas which experience frost) and may be summer pruned in late January/early February to encourage a good autumn flush.
- **More on positioning the pruning cut:** Some references emphasise the importance of positioning the cut (as shown in pictures on previous page), whereas others don't.
- **Protective clothing and gloves** are recommended as many heritage roses are very prickly.
- **Be very careful to clean pruning saws and secateurs between pruning each bush.** For weak growers it is particularly important not to transfer any diseases from bush to bush. Die-back can seriously affect some roses (more than others). Suggested sterilising methods include dipping pruning tools into one of the following: a solution of one part household bleach to nine parts water, one part tea tree oil to nine parts water, methylated spirits. Discard the sterilising solution safely after use (that same day).
- **To control over-wintering fungus spores** (such as black spot and powdery mildew), after pruning in July it may be advisable to spray with Lime-Sulphur on the bare stems and the soil around the bushes.

Specific guideline for pruning various types of heritage roses are given by Trevor Nottle.¹

*The information below has largely been extracted from Trevor's most informative book **Growing Old-Fashioned Roses** which, significantly, is Australian. He also kindly provided additional information to Susan via email during April, 2021.*

Whereas modern roses need to be pruned in late winter to produce an abundance of spring blooms and to take on a good shape, Old-Fashioned Roses can, in most cases, be left alone for years with no harm done; it is almost impossible to kill a rose by not pruning at all for years. The result will be a jungle, but the roses won't be worried, indeed they will probably grow with abandon. Pruning is an invention of gardeners, but the rules can be freely interpreted when needs demand. Similarly pruning can really be done at any time without real harm to the rose plants. They will grow back very well given food and water.

Before pruning any rose, it is imperative that you know its named variety and then check on its class. Refer to the (publicly accessible) *HelpMeFind* website www.helpmefind.com/rose/plants.php and/or *Modern Roses* database [the American Rose Society (ARS)].² It is not sufficient to just describe a rose as a "shrub" or "climber".

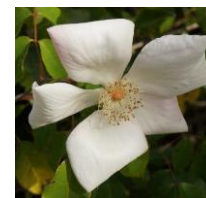
The same rules cannot be applied to all heritage rose, as the various classes have different growth habits and flowering schedule. For example, few wild roses are remontant; notable exceptions are *Rosa chinensis*, *Rosa rugosa* and *Rosa fedtschenkoana*. Amongst other classes, some are remontant and others are non-remontant.

Wild Roses and their Near Hybrids

As a group the wild (Species) roses and their hybrid offspring require very little pruning as they are by nature moderate to large shrubs and don't need pruning other than to rejuvenate them in their old age.

Before planting wild (or indeed any type of) roses, you should do research/consult catalogues to determine their growth habit and potential size. "Check before you buy" or, in this case "plant", may well avoid the following action suggested by Trevor:

If the wild roses you have don't fit the space allocated to them, then the roses should be shifted to where they can attain their natural forms, or be replaced by species which will fit into the spaces available.



Rosa gigantea – once flowering (non-remontant)

Old European Roses – Gallicas, Albas, Centifolias, Mosses and Damasks

The old European roses flower only once per year on wood made the previous year. (Occasionally freakish weather conditions may result in the odd flower appearing out of season.) European roses are essentially flowering shrubs and form dense thickets of boughs supporting a canopy of twiggy top growth from which a heavy crop of flowers appears in late spring or early summer.

Once the flowers fade a mass of short new growths emerge from just below the dead flower heads and these are the parts which will flower the next year.



Crested Moss, Centifolia (1827)

Any pruning should be done in summer, after flowering, and should be limited to the removal of one or two of the oldest branches and any dead wood.

After flowering and throughout the growing season, stronger growths will appear from lower down the base of the plant. These are not likely to produce flowers in the following year, but are the means by which the plant regenerates itself and replaces the boughs which die of old age. The new long canes which emerge from the base of the plant should be bent over and twined about each other to form loose arches – they may need to be tied loosely. This treatment will secure them against the wind and produce an excellent display of flowers from most of the dormant eyes along the stem in the following flowering season.

Note that Trevor has given a caution about this group: Make sure suckering and running roses e.g. Gallicas and Albas are planted with the bud union above the ground. After 20 years of growing and suckering widely these groups of roses become a real problem to control or remove; best not to risk so much hard digging or poisoning.

Bourbons, Hybrid Perpetuals and Portland Roses

The Bourbons and their other 19th century companions are repeat flowering (some are more or less perpetual) and they make growth which is similar in size, leafage and prickles to modern roses. The difference which is noticeable and significant is that the canes are much longer and more like the habit of a low climber.

The long canes of these roses allows for several different uses to which they may be put:

1. They may be used as flowering shrubs by allowing them to grow freely in the same manner as the old European roses.
2. They can be treated as moderate climbers to low climbers and trained against walls and trellises.
3. They can be treated as pillar roses whereby the canes are twined around a post or tripod set in the garden.
4. They may be "pegged down". Pegging down refers to taking each of the long canes and tying it to a peg set in the ground at a convenient distance from the plant. Pegs can be made from 30 cm lengths of heavy gauge wire bent into a loop at one end (*small tent pegs?*), the other end being firmly set in the ground. The canes should be tied a few cm from the ground with a soft plant tie/plastic tape. Avoid wire which could cut into the cane.

The effect of pegging down is to promote flowering shoots from almost every dormant bud along each of the canes.

For pictures of pegging, this link may be helpful: www.finegardening.com/article/train-roses-to-produce-more-flowers

Some roses may be self-pegged, by entwining two canes around each other: www.rosenotes.com/2009/02/pegging.html

Whichever method of training and pruning you decide to employ, the pruning points remain the same. Each of the canes will grow and produce good flowering wood for up to four years, after which they should be removed completely and their place taken by new growth.

- In the first season Bourbons, Hybrid Perpetuals and Portland roses produce long canes which usually have a terminal head of flowers followed by the growth of short side shoots.
- During the following winter these canes can be shortened by one third and the side shoots cut back to one or two eyes.
- In subsequent pruning seasons only the side shoots need to be trimmed and one or two of the oldest canes, or those blocking new growth, should be taken out as the process of renewal is continuous.
- As most of these groups are fairly vigorous growers there is usually ample strong new growth to bring into the training pattern each season.
- In warm areas, where the late summer growing period extends into a long, warm autumn, the wood will be well-ripened and summer pruning may be undertaken if done soon after the first flush of bloom finishes.

China Roses and Tea Roses

Chinas and Teas usually taken a few years to settle in and get established, so for the first few years it is almost unnecessary to do any formal pruning.

China roses will make low but very densely twiggy bushes and any pruning should be light. It is quite possible to simply clip them over into a roughly shaped dome and they will perform well. When water shoots have finished flowering they should be trimmed back to growing eyes below the flower head.

*Refer to Glennis Clark's article on p. 2 of the January 2021 Sydney HRIA Newsletter for information about **pruning Tea roses**. As Glennis concluded: Remember that Tea roses nearly always resent hard pruning! This is reinforced by Trevor on page 37 of his book: If you try to treat them (Teas) too harshly the result will be a few-flowered bush that gets a reputation for 'sulking'.*

Hybrid Musk Roses

Left unpruned Hybrid Musk roses will form masses of thick growth; given their dense growth, Hybrid Musks are recommended as informal flowering hedges.

Treated as a hedge, all that is needed is for the dead flower heads to be removed and maybe a quick clip over once a year to keep the 'hedge' neat. If you wish to promote the large flower heads that Musk roses are noted for then a little further pruning is needed. After the first flush of flowers in early summer all the flowering shoots should be cut back and in winter a similar procedure should be followed along with the usual removal of dead wood and the trimming back of long basal canes by one third.

The stems of Hybrid Musks are branched all along their length; avoid pruning away from the base just to tidy things up.

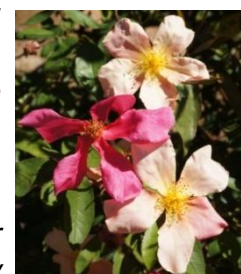
Rugosa Roses

The natural habit of Rugosa roses is to grow low, compact and tight-knit.

Rugosas are the 'no-prune' roses. Their growth is so dense and compact that they require no pruning for years. If used as a flowering bank or hedge (one of their best uses), Rugosas just need clipping into a uniform shape. Take care not to remove too much fruit bearing wood, lest their beautiful red hips be lost for the season.



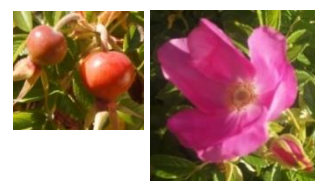
Boule de Neige,
Bourbon (1867)



Mutabilis
China (before 1894)



Penelope, Hybrid
Musk (1924)



Scabrosa, Hybrid Rugosa
(1950) – hips and flower

Climbing and Rambling Roses

Climbers are a diverse group of roses varying from low shrubby climbers (2.75 m/9 ft) to huge climbers (9 m/30 ft).

For the purposes of pruning, Trevor Nottle has put the Climbers into three categories:

Group 1. Recurrent and Perpetual blooming roses, such as the Climbing forms of Teas, Hybrid Teas, Noisettes and a few vigorous Bourbons and Hybrid Perpetuals.

Winter pruning is the general rule with this group of roses. All spent and twiggy growth should be taken out along with any dead wood and any new basal growth should be shortened back and tied into position against the wall or any support you have. Do not allow the canes to whip around in the wind.

Group 2a. Once-flowering Ramblers such as are usually sold as weeping standards. Facing up to a Weeping standard, for the first time – with its mass of thin, tangling stems cascading from overhead – can be rather daunting.

The following steps for pruning may be of assistance:

- Start by getting inside the bush and removing all the dead canes. You can be quite ruthless if the Weeper hasn't been pruned for years.
- Next work on the live growth. Begin by taking out all twiggy growth right back to the base.
- There should now be long drooping canes at various stages of development, from new shoots with no side growth to those with a well-developed framework of short side-shoots. Look over the whole bush and decide on a balance between the new and older branches. The rest can be cut out completely. The canes which remain can be tied onto the basket frame/rose ring and the growth cut back to your preferred length.

When a (once-flowering) Weeping Rambler has been rejuvenated, the object is to maintain a balance between the wood that is one, two and three years old – all the rest is unproductive and should be removed.

Group 2b. Repeat-flowering Ramblers can be pruned along similar lines but the summer pruning should be limited to the removal of the oldest canes only; intermediate aged canes a can be let alone to produce the second crop of flowers and may then be trimmed again in winter.

Group 3. Species and allied hybrids are the strongest growing of all roses and cannot be controlled satisfactorily by pruning. So, before planting a wild climbing rose great care should be taken to choose one which will fit into the space you have for it.

The only significant new pruning technique Trevor has seen (since his book was published in the 1980s) is sometimes used in European and English gardens where professional maintenance is the norm. Climbers are taken down from their support frames and completely defoliated before the tangle of canes is carefully 'un-wound'. Pruning is then carried out according to the three year rule described above and the whole plant then very carefully lifted up and tied back on the frame or trellis. The enormous expense of two or three gardeners working for days to prune each climbing rose in this manner for gardens that are open to the public for an entrance fee, is probably worth it. However, this process may less relevant for the 'average' Australian home rose garden.

Wild climbing roses should not be pruned other than to take out dead wood. If pruning must be done to keep pathways clear/free gutters etc, prune as necessary and forget about flowers the following year.

Group 1 – Recurrent Climbers



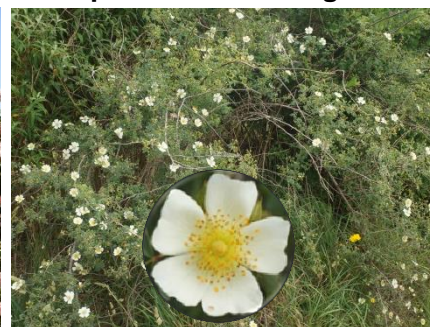
Lamarque, Noisette (1830)

Group 2a – Once flowering Ramblers



Albertine, Hybrid Wichuraiana (1921)
Note: This specimen is not a weeping standard

Group 3 – Wild Climbing roses



Rosa soulieana – a prickly, tall, arching Species rose

Pictured roses have been photographed by Susan at Harper's Mansion Berrima NSW, Rumsey Rose Garden Parramatta Park NSW, Old Parliament House Rose Gardens Canberra ACT, Morning Star Estate Mt Eliza Vic and private gardens at Burradoo, Fitzroy Falls and Westleigh NSW.

1. Trevor Nottle, *Growing Old-Fashioned Roses*, Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst NSW, 1983, pp. 34-38. (Also 2nd ed. 1995.) Trevor has advised that this book is long out of print (only second hand copies may be purchased) and that he has been unable to trace the current copyright holder. **Susan**.
2. The ARS serves as the International Cultivar Registration Authority - Roses (ICRA) by appointment of the International Society for Horticultural Sciences and *Modern Roses* lists all registered roses, not just "Modern".