

# SPRING PRUNING GUIDELINES For Central Florida

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If you know nothing, a little, or a lot about pruning, I suggest you attend the hands-on “Pruning Workshop” to be held at the February 2018 meeting. This workshop will walk you through suggested pruning techniques, which should be very helpful if you are not completely confident with your pruning capabilities. Pruning is much easier to understand by “seeing” rather than by “reading”. General pruning guidelines are provided below, but the workshop will cover specific techniques to help you accomplish your goals – healthy bushes with lots of blooms.

Pruning rose bushes can be confusing, especially for a new rose grower. You're not sure where to start ... or what to do. You may even want to skip pruning altogether. I must confess, we have all been there. Let me assure you -- YOU can prune your roses!!! By following some basic pruning guidelines you and your roses will appreciate the fruits of your labors.

Basically four pieces of “equipment” are required for pruning chores:

- 1) clean, sharp **by-pass** pruning shears;
- 2) small key hole saw;
- 3) brass bristled small brush (shaped like a large toothbrush and generally available from an auto part stores and home improvement stores in the welding section); and,
- 4) heavy duty puncture proof gloves (for your protection).

**The best pruning shear design for pruning roses is the bypass pruner**, which has two blades that cut like scissors. Anvil pruners, on the other hand, use a flat plate to push the cane against a single blade, which often results in crushed canes. **Anvil pruners are NOT recommended.** The importance of good quality **sharp by-pass pruning shears** cannot be over emphasized. Dull shears will leave ragged cuts on the canes that take longer to heal and are susceptible to dieback. An exceptional tool for maintaining sharp pruning shears is the Corona® Sharpening Tool (Model AC 8300), as shown in the photo, which can be purchased at Lowe’s or on the internet for around \$10.00, a wise investment. This tool is extremely easy to use. All it takes is several passes along the edge of the blade as described in the instructions. Or, if you cannot sharpen your shears, now is the time to take them in for sharpening or to buy a new pair of bypass pruners.

All roses need some type of pruning. If roses are not pruned for a number of years plants deteriorate in appearance, often develop more than the usual disease and insect problems, and the flowers become smaller and smaller. Pruning should be looked at as applying a few common sense principles to accomplish several tasks. These tasks are to remove dead, damaged, or diseased wood; remove crossing canes which rub against each other; keep the shrub from becoming a tangled mess; shape the plant; encourage the growth of flowering wood; and open up the center of the bush to let in sunlight and air which will minimize fungal diseases such as blackspot and mildew.

When is the best time to prune? In Central Florida pruning generally occurs between the middle of February and the beginning of March. In our garden we usually begin our pruning right after Valentine’s Day and finish the second week in March. If bushes are pruned earlier the effects of a February (or early March) freeze could damage tender new growth making re-pruning necessary.



**BY-PASS PRUNING SHEARS ...**

The best style shears for pruning and deadheading roses



**ANVIL PRUNING SHEARS ...**

Are **NOT** recommended for roses!!!



**Corona® Sharpening Tool (Model AC 8300)**

As stated above, the objective of pruning is to open up the center of the bush and reduce the plant to the most productive canes while providing a vase shaped structure. The first step in accomplishing this objective is the removal of dead, dying or diseased canes, twiggy or spindly growth, and crossing, rubbing or broken canes/stems. On older established bushes you should remove all thin weak canes that are smaller than a pencil in diameter. Young bushes should only be cleaned of dead wood and lightly tipped back.

The next pruning step on established bushes is to entirely remove older non-productive canes from the bud union. On 'grafted' roses, the bud union is where the desired rose variety (the top portion of the bush) was joined to the rootstock (the bottom portion of the bush). It is from this union that new canes (basal breaks) emerge. Non-productive canes are generally those that are shriveled, dark brown, gray, turning yellow or black, and can be also be identified by an abundance of bud scars and the absence of viable bud eyes on the cane. To remove these large canes from the bud union a keyhole saw and puncture proof gloves are the instruments of choice. I should note that I no longer use a key hole saw, but now use a cordless Sawzall (reciprocating saw), as it has much easier and has eliminated thorns in my hands. Both saws allows the cane to be cut flush with the bud union and the gloves keep the thorns from getting jammed into your hands. Leave the newest most productive canes in place. We generally leave from 6 to 10 major canes on each bush (depending on the type of rose).

While down at ground level inspect the plant for sucker growth, which are stems that originate from the rootstock below the bud union of a 'grafted' rose. Suckers on 'grafted' plants can be distinguished from the rest of the bush by differences in foliage and should be removed. If left to themselves, some suckers will eventually flower, showing blooms of the original variety, and very different from the grafted canes. The most common rootstock for Florida is Rosa Fortuniana, followed by Dr. Huey. If allowed to bloom, Fortuniana has small white flowers and Dr. Huey's flowers are red. If suckers are not removed, these fast-growing sprouts cause the bush to spend its energy on them, instead of on the upper canes of the desired variety that should be making flowers. The best way to remove sucker growth is to follow the sucker to its point of origin on the rootstock and to twist and tear it off where it emerges. Also gently scrape around the area where the sucker was removed with your fingernail to remove any side buds. Cutting suckers off with pruning shears will result in the re-growth of several suckers where only one was originally growing.

When the above tasks are completed you will be left with the remaining healthy major canes, These canes will then be reduced to approximately 1/3 to 1/2 of their total height. You want to cut these back, generally, to an outward facing bud eye. Bud eyes can be found all along the canes at the leaf axils, (where a leaf cluster was or is connected to the cane) (see photo on page 14). It is from these bud eyes that the new growth will emerge. Cutting to an outward facing bud eye will direct new growth outward, away from the center of the bush to produce an open centered plant. The pruning cut should be made about 1/4 inch above the bud eye.



"Suckers" growing from the rootstock below the bud union.

The bud union - Where the top portion of the bush was joined to the rootstock.

(Note the old crusty bark on bud union)



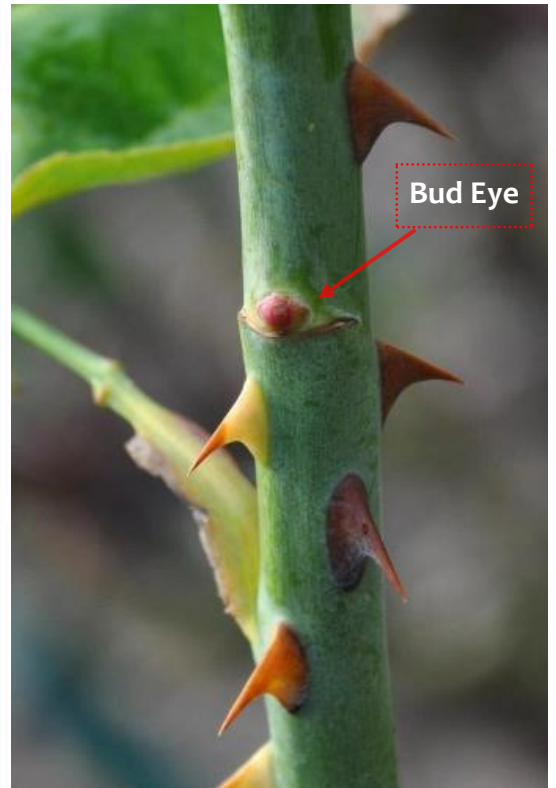


Stem cut too high  
above bud eye

Stem cut too low  
above bud eye

Stem cut  
just right !!

### PRUNING CUTS



**Bud eyes** can be found all along the canes at each leaf axils, (where a leaf cluster was or is connected to the stem).

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If the bush has foliage present, an outward facing bud eyes will be easy to find. However, cuts are often made further down canes where there is no foliage to guide us to the appropriate location to make the cut. Under these circumstances look for the dormant bud eye on these canes by locating where the foliage was once connected. The bud eye is normally visible as a slightly swelled "bump" above the surface of the cane. Correctly making these primary pruning cuts is the real key to success in pruning.

After the non-productive canes are removed and the remaining canes reduced in height, I recommend gently brushing the bud union with the small wire brush to remove the hard corky bark that has formed over the last year. Avoid brushing off any basal breaks that may be emerging. A basal break is a strong new cane growing from the base of the plant (from the bud union). Basal breaks are very desirable as they replace the older worn out canes that were removed, present lots of bud eyes for new growth and yield the biggest flowers. These new canes increase the longevity and productivity of your rose bushes. Removing the corky bark allows new basal breaks to grow from the bud union that might not otherwise push through the hard bark.

Upon completing the above pruning activities, I remove the remaining foliage from the plant (established plants – not young bushes). Some area rosarians leave the foliage. I have tried both ways and found that leaving the foliage results in fungus and insect problems (mainly increased mites) later on in the season. I believe that removing the foliage removes any insects, spores and diseases harboring on the foliage. Those that leave the foliage after pruning believe that method produces better roses in the long run. Why not try both methods on a few of your bushes and see which works best for you. The final "pruning activities" are to clean up the beds - pick up and throw away any fallen foliage, blooms, petals, etc. Finish by thoroughly spraying the pruned plants with a fungicidal spray mixed at the recommended dilution.

In conclusion, quoting from Tommy Cairns in *The Rose Exhibitors Forum*, "While you can learn from reading books, it is the practical aspects of your own garden that will ultimately educate you in the finer points of pruning. What is marvelous is that experimentation will teach you which varieties can be pruned hard (canes 2-3 feet or less) and which ones lightly (4 foot canes). The basic understanding of your rose varieties will enhance your enjoyment of rose growing, bringing a degree of satisfaction and pride. Approach rose pruning like an artist about to create a masterpiece. Imagine the bush as you will want it to look in the spring and the inspiration will follow."