

Is Your Soil Verklempt?

by Audrey McMurray

Here's the most common question I'm asked by gardeners who regularly spray liquid fertilizer on their roses. "I've been doing this for years and my garden has been great! My roses were never without blooms! So why is everything suddenly dying now?"

It could be that your garden is verklempt - all choked up. Liquid fertilizer has phosphate in it and if you remember from high school chemistry, phosphate is a molecule that will bind to just about anything. In the soil, over time, it will bind to the nutrients that your plants need to thrive and will render some of them incapable of being used by the plant.

The first thing you need to do then, is to stop using the liquid fertilizer. A spring and a fall application is about all that is needed for that stuff and really, if your soil is healthy the plants are going to bloom anyway. All roses will bloom in the spring and, if they are repeat bloomers, they'll bloom whenever they feel that reproductive urge! It takes a lot out of a plant to reproduce so why stress it by forcing it to bloom without a rest?

The second thing you need to do is to put back nutrients into the soil now, while you are waiting for those bound ones to slowly break down again. Here is a wonderful "tea" based on the witch's brew Auntie Lotte, a veteran Rustler, published a few years ago in the Old Texas Rose. Apply this every spring and fall and your plants will LOVE you.

In a knee-high garbage can put:

- 4 chimpanzees of Medina, any variety
(Start pouring and say "One-chimpanzee, two-chimpanzee, three-chimpanzee.")
- 1 chimpanzee of SuperThrive
- 2 chimpanzees of fish emulsion, liquid, if you can find it
- 1 cup of Epsom salts
- 2 cups of manure - or - 4 cups of manure/humus mix
- 2 cups of alfalfa, pellets or meal - it doesn't matter

Mix well. You can put a small coffee can's worth at the drip line (where most of the branches end) right away but most Rustlers let the mixture sit for a couple of days. Two days in the Texas sun makes it smell like something crawled in the wall and died. That's how we know it's ready.

Be sure to water the mixture in after applying. You can be a good neighbor and go outside with your small coffee can at night, if you want, and the smell will be gone by morning. Hopefully.