

PRUNING ANTIQUE ROSES

Personally my ideas about pruning roses have changed over time, but I will give you some basics that may help you feel more comfortable pruning your old garden roses.

1. Antique roses do not need or want the heavy and detailed pruning that hybrid tea roses require (definitely a plus as far as I am concerned).
2. The traditional date for pruning antique roses is Valentine's Day, February 14th which is easy to remember as this holiday is often associated with giving or receiving roses. A secondary pruning is now suggested around Labor Day for a heavy fall bloom.
3. At the same time you prune, you can fertilize although Mike Shoup of the Antique Rose Emporium in Brenham now suggests that no fertilization is needed if you mulch with natural materials. If you do fertilize, you can chose to use a commercial rose fertilizer (get the one with the lowest middle number as the phosphates indicated by the middle number can build up in the soil and cause problems) or you can use organic fertilizers. In fact this year I am going to use only cottonseed meal and composted goat manure and see how that works.
4. The first thing to do is cut out any dead wood which is something that you can do at any time of the year.
5. The rule of thumb is not to cut the bush down more than a third and to maintain its natural shape which you will get to know as you watch it growing during the year.
6. You also can cut out some limbs that are crossing as rubbing limbs can cause wounds which can let in disease. Thinning a bit is good as roses love good air circulation.
7. If your rose is a one-time bloomer, wait until after it has bloomed to prune.
8. If your rose reblooms throughout the growing season, you can do a little shaping as you deadhead.
9. The owners of the Vintage Rosery in Needville prune their roses with hedge clippers so you can see how anything goes.

Faith Bickley
Texas Rose Rustlers