

# MONTY'S ROSE CARE CALENDAR

Hybrid Teas, Grandiflora, Floribunda, and Climbers



*"Some people come into our lives, leave footprints on our hearts, and we are never the same." These were words written by Monty Justice and he truly lived by this motto. The footprints that he left with people he met were generated because of his love for people and his testimony. If you ever had the chance to listen or work with Monty, he would have left you with an everlasting memory. It is my hope that these guidelines and suggestions, first developed by Monty, will provide a better understanding on how to grow the best roses.*

*One of Monty's goals in growing roses was to make growing them easier each year so that you could enjoy the beauty of the plant and know your hard work will be enjoyed by so many. This is not a scientific calendar. It is the result of Monty's experiences working with roses in over 150 different rose gardens over many years. The mistakes he made provided direction on how to successfully grow roses. Since Monty's passing, we have added some new products have adjusted some of the routines, but the ultimate goal remains the same - to make your rose growing easier and more successful.*

*Dennis Stephens, President, Monty's*

## JANUARY

So long as you did those things suggested in the fall of the preceding year there is little that needs to be done in January. An application of PlantVantage® Premium Soil Conditioner to rose beds with a predominance of clay soil would be helpful. Add PlantVantage Premium Soil Conditioner to water, then water to the depth where the roots of roses are growing. Older rose beds (3 or 4 years old) will benefit greatly by making this application 4 times over the next 4 months. PlantVantage Premium Soil Conditioner increases porosity and aeration approximately 4" deep with each application. This treatment should also increase biological activity such as microbial populations.

## FEBRUARY

Around Valentine's Day, the application of a balanced granular fertilizer such as 10-10-10 or 14-14-14 will make the nutrients available to the plant roots as rain, snow and temperature fluctuations work the nutrients through the soil into the root zone. A small handful of fertilizer should be spread evenly around each plant. Adding nitrogen fertilizer to the cold soil of these dormant plants will not generate growth. Only the warming of soil will create new growth. When the soil does warm the plants will have a more vigorous growth as a result. Now is a good time to be looking for those unseasonably warm days to remove any remaining twiggy growth and any lateral stems that remain on the plants, other than the 3 or 4 main canes. Removal of all stems other than the 3 or 4 main canes should be completed before new growth begins in the spring, usually late March.

## MARCH

Hopefully you sprayed your roses in the fall with PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) (low nitrogen, high phosphorus and potassium) every two weeks or more until the December freezes made the plants dormant, or nearly so. Now it is time now to do additional pruning as follows: The 3 or 4 main stems should be cut back to a thickness larger than your little finger. All other stems and leaves should be removed. The 3 or 4 remaining stems should be free of any winter damage. Should you not have stems as thick as your little finger, retain the few larger ones. NOTE: The color of the pith of each stem should be cream colored which indicates no winter damage. Stems that do not exhibit this characteristic should be cut back as low as needed to eliminate the tan or brown stem piths.



## APRIL

Since you sprayed your roses with PlantVantage Root & Bloom (orange label /2-15-15) in the fall, there was no need to mulch your roses for winter protection. However, if you did mulch, you will need to pull the mulch back to warm the soil. Shortly after the forsythias bloom new growth will appear from the leaf axils of these good stems. This new growth will not be damaged by exposure to the sun and unlikely to be damaged from freezing temperatures that are no lower than 28 degrees Fahrenheit. Since the roots of plants grow between the particles of soil, which must contain air, the lighter, more porous the medium, the more readily roots develop and reach out for faster top growth.

Another application of a balanced rose fertilizer (my preference is 14-14-14, with trace minerals; 1/4 cup per plant). Once the roses have leaves, begin wetting the foliage with PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) as often as twice weekly. Should freezing temperatures be forecast wetting the leaves beforehand with PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) will help protect this tender growth. It may change the color from a purplish red to dark green.

**FACT:** The farther the roots reach out to get the food, the larger and more vigorous the plant will become.

*NOTE: Leaves that are purplish red do not get blackspot. Therefore a spray program to protect from blackspot is usually not needed until late April or early May when the foliage turns green.*

## MAY

We began our spray program when the buds were pea sized and leaves turned green – usually late April, or early May. A mix of fungicide and insecticide should be applied according to the label directions as a preventative for disease and insect damage. Add the following to each gallon of the mix: 1 tablespoon epsom salts, 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar, 1/2 teaspoon PlantVantage Premium Growth (yellow label/8-16-8). No need to add a spreader sticker to the spray mix as the PlantVantage will serve this purpose. If the ground is dry, moisten the soil before spraying the plant to avoid leaf burn. Always add PlantVantage Premium Growth (yellow label/8-16-8) to the water applied to the ground if vigorous growth is desired or Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) when the plant size is as large as you want. Maintain this spray program for the remainder of the growing season.

As temperatures warm into the mid 80's, spider mites will crawl up the stems and begin sucking the chlorophyll or green color out of the lower leaves. It is essential to maintain the vigor of your roses by having healthy green leaves. Mites do not like water so once a week use a Monty's hose end sprayer nozzle or other hard, fine water sprayer to thoroughly wash the underside of leaves, particularly those at the bottom of your rose plants. Spray more frequently if the mites are already present. Adding PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) to the water will have an added benefit to the health of your roses. If you have followed our program for rose care, your roses on larger, vigorous plants may be bloom in early May. This has the added benefit of being several weeks earlier than your neighbors' roses! PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) plant food sprayed on the leaves tends to enlarge the leaf surface, making the energy from sun's rays more effective, which develops healthier, stress free plants. If your roses have about finished their first bloom cycle, the procedures for June may be started in May.

*NOTE: Have you made 4 applications of PlantVantage Premium Soil Conditioner to your rose bed areas that have clay or poor, hard soil in the root zone? If you have, then the clay soil particles are now surrounded with air allowing for good root growth up to 10 inches deep.*



If you are looking to create an organic mix to prevent bugs and disease, this mix, with only three items, may be just what you're looking for:

- 1 gallon of water (Use an empty milk jug)
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 2-1/2 tablespoons of a light vegetable oil (Crisco)

Shake well and add this mix to a hand sprayer. Agitate hand sprayer while in use. Spray weekly and after rain, trying to mist the lower leaves, particularly their underside. If you can't spray under some leaves, pick them off. Spray the buds to control insects.

## JUNE

Prior to June your roses have either bloomed out or currently have strong stems with many blooms. Consider the following suggestions for continued vigor and blooms during the heat of summer:

1. The roses are exhausted. Each plant produced as many stems and blooms as the energy within the plant provided. Now is the time to "dead-head," by snapping off the bloom without taking any stems or leaves. This will allow the sun's rays to penetrate the plant and more quickly replenish needed strength and vigor. Continue wetting the leaves with PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) frequently.
2. If your plant has leaves within 4" to 6" of the ground, put on your gloves, get down on your knees and remove them. Then cover the rose bed with 2" of woody mulch.
3. Apply 1/4 cup of a good dry fertilizer.
4. Applying a little Epson Salts (2 tablespoons) evenly around each plant will not hurt anything and may be very helpful.

When mulching, coarse, wood mulch is preferred. Fine particle mulch will break down next to the soil and "crust." This crust prevents needed air percolation and should it occur, it would need to be loosened with a fork around each rose plant. When soil temperatures are above 70 degrees in the root zone, there will be no new root growth (The reaching out of new feeder roots). Sterile mulches maintain a constant moisture level as well as providing a buffer between the ground and the plant that prevents disease spores from blowing into or splashing up on the leaves. Wood chips from a tree company will provide great mulch for the season and when it breaks down it will provide great nutrients and organic matter for the soil for the coming seasons.

Now if you're really serious about having vigorous roses you may want to try this concoction called ALFALFA TEA. Materials needed:

- 32 gallon garbage can with a tight lid
- Alfalfa meal or pellets
- Available water
- 4-ounces Monty's Premium Growth (yellow label/8-16-8)
- A long stirring stick

Preparation:

- Add 6 cups alfalfa to the container
- Fill nearly to the top with water
- Add 4 ounces of Monty's Premium Growth (yellow label/8-16-8) and stir until the alfalfa is wet
- Cover tightly and let steep for 5 days or so
- Uncover and stir the foamy green fermented solution. It STINKS!!!
- It's ready to apply one gallon or so on the leaves and around each medium to a large plant; only a quart per miniature.
- Once applied to the roses and rose bed there is minimal odor.

When the garbage can is nearly empty, pour out the sediment in the garden or on the soil where you have other plants that need a boost. Recharge the container with alfalfa tea and you'll be ready to do again next week. It won't burn. Alfalfa may be scratched into the soil; 1 or 2 cups around each large bush. This works well but the concentrated tea works a lot faster. The leaves of the roses become thicker and healthier and new vigorous growth will appear after just a few applications. If you can stand the smell, you'll LOVE the results.

Don't forget to water the ground before spraying. Continue routine pesticide spraying.



## JULY

If you have applied PlantVantage Premium Soil Conditioner several times to your rose bed as recommended, you should notice improvements in how well the bed drains and in the character of the clay soil. Your plants should have strong, tall canes higher than your waist. Heavy pruning of the roses after the 2nd cycle of growth is needed. This is a completely different approach to only the bloom removal that was suggested at the end of the 1st bloom cycle.

1. Remove all twiggy and lateral stems smaller than a pencil
2. Cut back remaining stems to a thickness as large as your little finger
3. The height of these stems should be no taller than your thigh to your waist
4. To prevent borers seal the end of these newly cut stems. I smear them with moist soil. It makes them tan or brown. The borer that lays eggs will only do so on cream colored ends. Canes with borer holes must be cut below this damage in order for these stems to be productive.

During the active growing season PRUNING CREATES VIGOR. You have now pruned with a purpose that follows:

1. The new growth and energy within the plant will come from thicker stems that will be about head high the 3rd bloom cycle.
2. When they bloom in September the stems will be strong enough to hold up the blooms even when it rains.
3. This type of pruning is not done on all the stems at one time. It is done as each weary bloom or cut flower is removed from the plant.
4. Therefore, this type of pruning may start before mid-July and continue through the first week of August.

Resist the temptation to over water your roses because of the heat. You can harm the vigor of your roses by filling the needed air spaces in the soil with water. Roses don't need any more water now than earlier in the year. What they need is more frequent watering of both leaves and soil together with PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15). Continue your regular spray program, wetting the leaves in between spraying a pesticide with PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15). This high phosphorus, high potassium, low nitrogen formula can add additional protection to your rose plants from disease.

Look back at previous months to make sure you are using all of the ingredients suggested to be added to your spray mix which will help maintain healthy roses. The cooler fall temperatures that make roses so rewarding are just ahead. The hard work of getting roses to this point is mostly over and the joy of having them in bloom until Thanksgiving exceeds the length of time for blooms of most any other plant.



## AUGUST

Continue July's maintenance program. However, after mid-August cut back stems with spent blooms only a few inches. If you cut back to a thick stem as was suggested in July you will be encouraging repeat blooms. At this time of year, we have most likely run out of time for repeat blooms.

To enhance the size of the bloom, combine 1 tbs Epsom salts to each gallon of diluted PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15). Pay particular attention to the tender, new growth at the top of the rose plants. The cooler nighttime condition will cause mildew problems unless frequent spray mix is applied to this area.

Adding PlantVantage Premium Soil Conditioner to the soil should be particularly effective as the cooler soil temperatures encourage the rose roots to "reach out."

"Pinch out" side growth beneath the forming bloom on hybrid teas if large single bloom stems are desired. PlantVantage products have iron, which enlarges the leaf surface of the plants foliage as well as enhances the color of the bloom. If adding to other fertilizer, use no more than 1/2 teaspoon per gallon per plant at a given time to avoid toxicity. Always include PlantVantage in solution with any other added nutrients as it will act as a buffer to prevent damage.

## SEPTEMBER

Discontinue any dry or high nitrogen plant food for the rest of the year. Continue using PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) on the leaves and whenever water is applied to the soil.

The discipline required to have a really good rose garden is simply a matter of basically an attitude that says I need to do what the rose wants, when it wants it, not when I find time to do so. It's been demanding to take the steps outlined in the months earlier that has brought us to the joy of seeing long stemmed, intensely colored blooms that last now that cooler temperatures are here. I know of only 5 things that you need to watch out for this month.

1. Mildew on the leaves at the top of the plant.
2. The yellowish green Cucumber Beetles with black spots will eat holes in the petals of the opening blooms.
3. Dew falling on light colored rose blooms will leave very undesirable pink spots, a fungus called Botritis.
4. Rain that enters opening blooms, softening the petals and many times causing them to fail to open, unless you take steps to correct this within a few hours of the rain stoppage. Rather than have rain in the blooms destroying them, cut long stems as desired and with a centrifugal arm motion, moisture can be eliminated from the blooms. You will be surprised how effective this procedure is.
5. Deer: I've tried lots of products on the market. Most work for a while, but if you have deer in your area there is no guarantee that they can't wipe out the whole 3rd cycle of bloom. I only know of one sure fire solution – AN ELECTRIC FENCE!

## Enjoy and share your success!

Enjoy your roses. Cut long stems. Share them with others. And if you are interested in exhibiting I have a few additional tips.

1. Learn what the rose judge is looking for.
2. Plant in your garden varieties that are proven "winners."
3. Choose blooms for single specimen entries that are fresh and clean, that are 3/4 open with the outer row of petals extending outward, horizontal with the ground. You will not receive a blue ribbon unless the rose has a pointed center
4. The opening blooms should have uniform spaces between each petal, with the same number of petals around this center. I have at times removed a petal or placed it gently on the other side to receive this desired result. You cannot add anything to a rose but you are simply "shifting." If you do not succeed, you were not going to win with that rose anyway.

Von Weddle was our top exhibitor for many years. I asked him why so many of his roses had good centers while very few of mine did. His answer: "Starting 10 days before the show lightly water the top 2" of the rose bed two times a day." Every time you water, you're also adding fresh air which is what rose roots want most. Remember to feed Monty's when you water. Roses take in water during night time and when the sun hits the plant the next morning they open rapidly.

When cutting blooms off the bush, immerse the stem and foliage in warm water in a cool, dark place. This will do wonders for maintaining the quality of the bloom that you saw on the bush. When a cut bloom is placed in a vase of water the absorption of water will cause your bloom to open. Therefore by watering the garden frequently before cutting, the turgid plants will tend to retain the form of the rose and change very slowly.

Finally, join the Rose Society. It's for people who are not that knowledgeable but want to enjoy their roses more. There will be folks willing to help you make your endeavors worthwhile.

## OCTOBER

With colder October temperatures you may think that the rose season is finished. Fortunately, no one has let your plants know this. The soil is in the best condition of the year. If you cared for your roses in September, there's plenty of food and moisture available to the plant roots for 4-6 more weeks should you do nothing. It takes that long for the soil to dry out to a depth where you usually find rose roots. Yes, freezing temperatures down to 28 degrees F. will slow the process of blooms to open but not damage them. But, a week or so of warm temperatures that we almost always have will continue to open buds that are showing color.

Continue using your spray mix if you have leaves on the plant and have not had a frost or freeze. Discontinue spraying pesticides

If you have not used Monty's products, it is not too late to do so. Go to your local garden store and purchase PlantVantage Premium Soil Conditioner as well as a 16 ounce bottle of PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15). Apply according to label instructions. Both items are also available at our web site ([myplantvantage.com](http://myplantvantage.com)).

1. Moisten the ground of your rose beds with PlantVantage Premium Soil Conditioner but do not water the rose bed. I believe nature knows best how plants prepare for winter. Traditionally October is the driest month of the year in our Zone #6.
2. Wet the leaves of your plants with PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) every two weeks until the end of the year.
3. On a pretty day, after a hard freeze remove any remaining leaves within 12" of the ground so you can see to begin pruning away twiggy, diseased and cross over branches at the base of the plant. Do not remove the 3 or 4 strongest stems with leaves. This is only a beginning pruning process that should continue in the spring. At this time of year pruning at the base of the rose prior to a hard freeze will not initiate new growth.

In a short period of time, PlantVantage Premium Soil Conditioner has adjusted the pH of other growers' soils into the good range. I would encourage you to see if using PlantVantage Premium Soil Conditioner will prove helpful in balancing the soil nutrients in your garden. It is 100% organic and effective in developing good root systems resulting in strong, healthy plants.

If the crowns of the rose plants are above the ground adding 2" of mulch after the ground is frozen may not protect them from winter damage. Therefore after a hard freeze, digging up and replanting these plants with the crown just below ground level can be done any time before the ground freezes. You need not try to maintain soil on these roots, they can be moved "Bare Root."

## NOVEMBER

November is the last opportunity for you to follow Monty's program for winterization. Certain things must be in place for you to do so.

1. You need to have purchased PlantVantage Premium Soil Conditioner and PlantVantage low nitrogen Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15). A good spray applicator makes the use of these products so easy.
2. Green leaves on the stronger stems (probably at the very top) are essential.
3. Suggestions made for October rose care that were not completed in October can be carried over to November.

Enjoy the last blooms of the season, cutting long stems if desired. Leave spent blooms and seed pods on the plants even though they are no longer attractive.

If you protect your plants by spraying the leaves 6 times before the end of December, they will not require added mulch for protection. We have seen roses grown on Fortuniana rootstock, whose crown or bud union is normally above ground level, showed little or no damage and no loss of plants from two consecutive winters with temperatures as low as zero when treated as described above. This was true in as many as 15 locations. Nothing further needs to be done other than cleaning up the rose bed of unwanted debris which can be done readily with an electric power or gas blower.

For someone who has annually gone to much trouble to protect not only the roots, crown, and canes from winter damage, it is a real leap of faith to believe and follow Monty's simple winterization program. All I can say is... it does work!





## AN ALTERNATE WINTERIZATION PROGRAM

Not having leaves on your roses to absorb Monty's PlantVantage products will not harden the stems and give your roses protection from winter's scourge. You therefore should use one of the old tried and true methods of winter protection such as those from my friend and excellent rosarian, Carolyn Phelps.

1. It's a good time to add lime if your soil has become acidic. If you have added compost or dry fertilizer this year, then a good "handful" forked in 6 to 8 inches around each bush will be beneficial. Lime must be incorporated to be effective.
2. Do not fertilize or water deeply. Sprinkle the ground only if you have plants with maturing buds. Leave seed pods to lessen energy loss from new growth. Rose plants that go into winter in a "dry" condition have minimum damage to the canes with none to the roots.
3. You can prune hybrid teas, grandifloras, floribundas and minis after the ground is frozen or two good freezes (temperatures in the 20° degree F range) or you can wait to do so before new growth begins in March. Remove lateral stems off the main canes, twiggy stems, crossover and damaged stems as well as the leaves from the plants and rose bed. A blower will be helpful for this. On big roses retain those stems larger than a pencil cut out the center stems of minis and the crowded middle of large roses. Wait to prune climbers and old garden roses until after they bloom in the spring. The stems of shrub roses should all be shortened at least a few inches but few if any healthy stems should be removed completely. This will allow each stem to bloom over the entire plant.
4. A two inch woody mulch over the entire bed should prevent "too early" spring growth that would be killed by a later freeze. If the crown or bud union of your plants are covered by soil, and it has good drainage (roots rot with soils saturated with water during winter months) and the rose plants remained with healthy leaves going into winter, they should come through the winter in good condition for spring growth.

If you want to protect the canes over winter, you will need to mulch higher the center of each plant, or use materials such as cardboard, styrofoam cones, roofing paper or burlap to keep the sun and wind from hitting these stems. I don't go to this trouble. I expect to stick my loppers in the 2 inch mulch and cut off all of the top growth. It looks like the roses are gone. This eliminates overwintering blackspot spores and the energy stored in the plant will produce healthy new growth from good tissue when the ground warms in the spring.



## DECEMBER

Keep up with the winterization of your roses by wetting the leaves of your plants with PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) every couple of weeks until freezing temperatures have you saying, "I'm not doing this anymore!"

It may be too early to tell which stems remaining on your roses have not been damaged as yet from the cold of winter. It could be that some of the stems on your roses did not have sufficient leaves to take the protective nutrients into the cells of the plant to prevent damage. You may not be able to tell for several months whether this has occurred. If all of the stems remaining on your plant had foliage and you were able to spray them with PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) there should be no winter damage from the thin tips that are 4"-5" tall. Stems that did not have sufficient leaves to take in Monty's protective nutrients may discolor and be damaged like other rose stems that you have had in the past.

When the worst of winter has passed, the canes may turn black to the ground or the damage will be discovered when you prune your roses before new growth begins in the spring. This will be seen by the pith of the stems being darker than healthy cream colored pith. Only stems with leaves receiving the protective nutrients in PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15) will be protected in subzero temperatures. You can get an early forecast of the success of this program by going out and cutting a few inches of the rose stems in your garden. The canes are

brittle much like fresh green beans that you snap. If this is the case I have not found a continuing cold winter climate to do damage. Should the stems be soft and easy to cut through those stems will most probably need to be cut off later in the mulch or ground before new growth begins. A 2" woody mulch may be applied to the rose bed, after the ground is frozen not to protect from winter damage, but to keep the soil from warming too early in the spring and new tender growth from starting. Applying mulch to a wet, poor draining soil will increase bacteria that can create issues for the coming spring and can result in losing most of the roses.

Only use aged manure as a mulch as "hot" manure will steal the moisture from the soil causing the plants to desiccate and be severely damaged if not killed. If you choose you may reduce the height of your rose stems to a thickness as large as or larger than your little finger. It can be done now or before new growth begins in the spring.

Anytime from the 1st of December to the middle of February prune roses for winter and apply 2" of mulch. You should want to control when your roses start to grow in the spring. Roses are going to start to grow when the yellow forsythia blooms. The reason for new spring growth is very simply the ground has warmed up, the roots start to reach out and new top growth appears. By applying a 2" woody type cover on the ground above the rose roots, sun and heightened spring temperatures are not likely to warm soils that have been mulched. Delayed spring growth will have been obtained.

We've been talking about protecting that portion of the rose above the ground but we have not looked at is the rose plant's survival with little if any damage. Some things are controllable and some things we just live with. A rose has natural protections when the outside temperatures decline gradually. However, care should be taken should these conditions occur:

1. The temperature suddenly falls below 40 degrees F. The plant will surely be damaged if unprotected by some physical means (cardboard boxes) or the application of PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label /2-15-15).
2. The crown or bud union is above ground level. A non-porous mulch (hardwood) or replanting may give the needed protection.
3. Poorly draining soils or too much mulch, resulting in saturated soils, will rot the roots. Take a warm day to rework your rose bed, then apply PlantVantage Premium Soil Conditioner.
4. Tree roots invading the rose bed, stealing needed water and nutrients. Place a sturdy, rigid barrier between the roots of the tree and the rose bed.

We lose most roses from "Too Early Spring Growth." When outside temperatures elevate in late February / March for 10 days or more ground temperatures will also rise and the plants will use their stored energy to leaf out. These new purplish / red leaves will likely be killed from late spring frost or freezes unless covered with cardboard boxes or sprayed with PlantVantage Premium Root & Bloom (orange label/2-15-15). Should these leaves be killed there may not be enough energy in the plant to send up new growth.



### About the Author

Dennis Stephens has been both the President of Monty's Plant Food Company and the Director of Research and Development since they company incorporated in 1996. He has been working with farmers and gardeners around the country for over 20 years -- spending more than 12 years working closely with Monty Justice developing award-winning roses gardens around the country. Dennis received his bachelor's degree from Eastern Kentucky University and he has a Masters of Science in Social Work from the University of Louisville. His expertise is in microbial activity and the impact humics has on them. This consists of studying humics, the rhizosphere, soil types, etc. Dennis is an active member at Southeast Christian Church and, specifically, within the men's disciple studies. He also enjoys fishing, hunting and golf.

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