

An amateur rose gardener's lessons learned By Catarina Kidd, Contra Costa Master Gardener

Having grown up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the “gateway to the Midwest,” I was thrilled to discover the variety of plants that could grow in the gardens here in the Bay Area. My memories of gardening with my mother were framed by the seasons, as the warm weather was in short supply. We would watch the fall weather reports on high alert for predicted frost and race out late afternoons to tent the plants with garbage bags. Our one or two prized rose bushes needed extra care so that they could hibernate successfully. So when I learned that roses don't truly go dormant in Northern California, I bought, dug and planted with full enthusiasm. Within one season, only a handful of roses escaped the rust, cane borers, powdery mildew and aphids that seemed to be winning out.

These are some quick lessons learned from one new gardener to another:

- **Start small and slow.** Roses, like puppies, are easy to fall in love with. Only buy a number you and your site can handle. If you're new at this, it is hard not to love everything and wind up with too many roses that don't get the attention they deserve to look their best.
- **Respect the needs to the rose.** “But it says disease resistant!” Disease resistant does not mean carefree or low maintenance. Roses are divas. They are not willing to share their space, water or sun. If you make them share, they'll likely show their displeasure with poor blooms and diseased foliage. “Disease resistance” is only real if you first meet your rose's basic needs.
- **Study your site and move roses to the ideal spots.** This will help you group your plants properly and irrigate efficiently. Note where the sun is in the morning and afternoon. Which direction does your site drain water? What other plants or trees are near your roses? Are they too close and hogging up resources? Move roses well away from trees and areas that don't drain well.
- **Think quality over quantity.** It is OK to change your mind once you have planted a rose and see how it performs. With the thousands of varieties of roses available, keep only those that you are truly thrilled about, so it is worth your precious time and space. Dig up the rose bush that isn't working for you and give it to another gardener who might have more time, space or sun for it.
- **Consider other plants.** Drought tolerant, native plants are good choices that don't require as much time or water. Check out other attractive shrubs, bunch grasses or perennials. These can fill in the spaces that get filtered sun or part day sun.
- **Build your knowledge and get advice.** Read up on roses beyond the descriptions of what's selling in the nurseries. Find out how and how often to water, about the best ways to get rid of pests and fungus without targeting beneficial insects, etc. University of California maintains a handy website with plenty of useful tips for roses: <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu>