

Desert Rose

No matter what the climate – extremes of temperature, precipitation, and sunshine – people want roses blooming in their yards. There are about 100 species, and thousands of cultivars, of this flower. Even in the parched Mojave Desert, they can be desirable additions to the garden. Roses actually do well in this arid climate. Possibly there are cultivars that have been over-bred and overfed, but they are generally really tough, irresistible plants.

According to Rose Magazine, some members of the genus *Rosa* developed in America, but most originated in Europe and Asia. **Many** of them do well in our desert: hardy shrub roses, but also climbers, hybrid teas, miniatures and grandifloras.

Like so many other plants, roses are not their best in the middle of summer. At high temperatures, the flowers do not reach full size. No plant will expend much energy building a flower when its main goal is simple survival! Even then, provide the plant with some half-strength fertilizer and one fourth cup Epsom salts. If the leaves look pale, but still have green veins, the plant might be lacking iron or zinc. You can get these amendments at any local nursery. You should also be concerned with making the soil more acidic. Desert soils tend to be quite basic, and a frequent cause of deficiencies.

Like many landscape plants, roses do best with deep watering, which means more water, less often. Lawn sprinklers do not provide enough water to keep a rose happy and healthy. In general, plan on watering once a week. When temperatures are very high, then irrigate twice a week. When watering deeply, make sure that the soil has good drainage. Nothing is worse for roots than having excess water at the root zone.

Roses need several hours of direct sun for flowering, but afternoon desert sun is generally too intense, which can scald flowers and foliage. Plant them where they receive morning sun.



Other problems that afflict roses are insect pests, and a disease called powdery mildew. Many times, the best way to get rid of small insects, such as aphids, is to hit them with a strong stream of water from a hose. Although aphids can fly, they rarely fly back onto the plant. Powdery mildew is a disease that looks like talcum powder on the leaves, the stems, even on buds and flowers. It is caused by a fungus that appears wherever people grow roses, but it shows up here once the humidity gets a little high. Controlling the disease can be tricky. Some varieties are more resistant than others, and work is being done on biological control. Bicarbonate salts seem to be effective, but prevention is the most important thing. Make sure that the plants receive morning sun, and irrigate them in the morning. If you have a diseased cane or branch, remove and destroy it. Always remove old plant debris so it will not be a source for more disease.



Good luck with your beautiful roses. For written information on rose care, call the Master Gardener help line at 702-257-5555.

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