

Protecting Your Roses....On Your Way To Winning

By: Richard Anthony & Kristine Vance

A major concern for serious exhibitors is the weather for the three to five days leading up to the rose show. Is it going to be hot or cold, sunny or cloudy or rainy or clear skies? All of these weather variables can and do impact the quality of the blooms that we will take to the rose show. Fear not...we may not be able to control the weather but **we can protect our roses from the elements**; at least to some degree as we shall learn.

Bloom protection falls into **three primary categories; protection from insects, rain or dew and the sun**. We will address each of these three areas along with a “how to” for each that you might want to consider. Protection from insects for a spring rose show is not something most of us get too excited about during the months of May and June as contrasted to the devastation insects can render on our roses for the fall shows. You may see **Aphids** covering a peduncle and emerging bud but this can be easily controlled by using your fingers, a sharp stream of water or with a severe infestation, a quick spray with Merit and the problem will soon be alleviated. **Spider Mites** typically do not concern us until we have a prolonged stretch of hot and dry weather. A sharp stream of water on the undersides of the leaves every other day (for about a nine day stretch) combined with a systemic insecticide will more often than not bring the concern under control rather quickly. We add a systemic insecticide to our spray routine and typically do not encounter problems with either Aphids or Spider Mites.

Protection from the **morning dew** is another concern for serious exhibitors and should be for our novices as well. A relatively heavy morning dew will result in water spots (‘Gemini’ and ‘Class of 73’) on some roses rendering them to honorable mention status at best when being judged. Most of us have noticed a highly promising bloom on the show table that would have fared well had the bloom been protected from water spots; covering your most promising blooms will do just that. We use **sandwich bags** to cover most, if not all, of our promising blooms. Initially we were using Baggies or comparable sandwich bags but slitting the flap got to be a time consuming chore. The reason you slit the flap is two fold; additional protection and to prevent the uncut flap filling with water should it rain. This we learned the hard way one day when we lost over half of our promising blooms as the weight of the water that had completely filled inside the flap and destroyed the center of numerous blooms due to its weight.

Last spring we found a new source of sandwich bags (**Hefty Baggies**) that was in a roll without the customary flap typically associated with most brands of sandwich bags. We found this to not only be a major time saver as we did not have to slit the flap; we typically will use five to seven hundred bags each day but also a far superior bag to use as the length was about an inch longer than a Baggie. Around **6:30 PM** in the early evening we take a walk up and down each row of roses and whatever promising bloom we see has a baggie placed over it. It can take up to an hour and a half to cover all of the blooms that we want to protect. We try to insure that a few leaves hold the bag in place as winds that approach

ten to fifteen MPH can and will cause the bags to go flying; not something your neighbors will appreciate no matter how many roses you give them at non rose show times. Removing the bags early the next morning takes considerably less time. We **DO NOT** reuse the bags unless there was absolutely no dew at all on the baggies; we frequent the Dollar Store and typically buy our rolled baggies by the case. Bear in mind that the baggies work extremely well for keeping the dew off of the bloom but are completely inadequate regarding rain protection if the rain is particularly heavy. A light mist is not a concern as the bloom will be protected with a baggie; the concern is using baggies during a heavy down (One half to one inch of rain per hour) pour as roses that are close to perfection will usually be lost as the baggie sits right on top of the bloom and it never fails that a large drop of water invariably will land precisely in the center of the bloom and ruin it.

Protecting promising blooms from a **heavy rain** or the **sun** in the case of blooms that either burn ('Dublin' and 'Memphis King') or shading them to maintain a consistent coloration ('Abbey's Angel') is best accomplished using some type of container that will completely cover the bloom. Our preference is to use both gallon and half gallon milk containers although two liter juice containers work well also; both the **solid colored** and the **clear** containers. We use the solid colored containers to protect roses from burning or to keep the sun off of them and the clear containers for roses that we want to protect and also receive ample amounts of sun. After rinsing the containers completely out we cut the bottom two inches of the container off. We have found that serrated steak knives work best for this endeavor. We use 3/8 inch X three to four foot long wooden dowels that have one end wrapped with one sheet of a paper towel; the wrapped end is then forced up into the handle. The container is then placed directly over the bloom head with the cap on. Twist ties or rubber covered wire is secured around both the cane and the wooden dowel. You can't prevent the container from moving in the wind but by securing the cane to the dowel you end up with both moving in unison which results in no damage to the bloom which will surely result in the wind if they are not secured.

We check the covered roses daily removing the cap and peering into the container from above in order to determine if the rose is ready to cut or not; clear containers are somewhat easier to determine than are colored containers for this chore. We don't suggest removing the container to check the bloom as invariably you will forget the cane is secured to the wooden dowel and this can be a non habit forming situation that at most will ruin only one or so blooms each rose season. Unless we are expecting a serious rain fall, we tend to save the milk containers for the fall shows and use the large containers for Hybrid Teas and Floribundas and the one half gallon containers for both Miniature and Miniflora roses. For those of you who appreciate the beauty of a **spray** and enjoy exhibiting them, we suggest covering your promising sprays with plastic grocery bags; it works well and beats using numerous baggies for each spray.

As always if you have questions or comments about this or any of the other articles we have written in this series, please direct them to Richard at RJA4CPA@aol.com or Kristine at Beancntr30@wideopenwest.com.