

Water and Roses....On Your Way to Winning

By: Richard Anthony & Kristine Vance

In our effort to grow award winning roses we should be cognizant of the fact that roses require the air we breathe, water, nutrients, a slightly acidic very light friable soil combined with a lot of TLC. Air is not a concern and we have already addressed the roses' need for various nutrients.

With that in mind let's take a look at water issues as they relate to our national flower. Water cannot be over emphasized in relation to growing prize winning roses. All of us at one time or another have, in all likelihood, lost roses due to overwatering. This is perhaps why so many rosarians are reluctant to provide the necessary amount of water to grow the rose to be all it can be. Plain and simple...roses require ample amounts of water.

With a well drained raised bed of light organically amended soil, it is nearly impossible to over water your roses. It is said that roses require at minimum one inch of water per week. According to Bob Martin, in his book of "**Showing Good Roses**", one inch of water will equate to about three gallons per large rose bush. Using this as a guideline, the water that roses will require will increase or decrease predicated on the following:

- Temperature
- Humidity
- Wind conditions

Hot and dry prevailing conditions requiring considerably more water than cooler weather without the drying effects of wind.

Obviously the size of the rose bush will impact the amount of water necessary for the plant to thrive and to provide you with award winning blooms. The larger the bush, the more water it will require. We use a rule of thumb that Hybrid Teas, OGR's and Floribundas receive approximately twice as much water as miniatures and minifloras. When to water is something that we tend to get a feel for. Cooler temperatures in the spring may dictate that we water once a week whereas hot weather that is typical of July and August may require water every two to three days (or even more frequently).

Where your roses are grown will impact the frequency of watering. Roses planted in beds require less frequent watering than roses grown in containers. All of our roses were grown in containers last year, and in all likelihood the entire '09 growing season, making it almost a fulltime job in our household. This was especially noticeable during a few weeks in July last year when the wind picked up and the temperatures hovered close to 90 degrees for a few weeks. This required near daily watering for any rose that was in a five gallon or less container size. Conversely, the cooler temperatures of late fall required considerably less watering.

By what means you water is not a concern of the rose. Some rosarians utilize a **drip irrigation system** while others water from a watering can or by hose. Not having our roses in the ground last year compelled us to take advantage of watering all of our roses via a

hose. We use a four foot long water wand with a bubbler attachment which allows a steady gentle flow of water. We timed how long it took for a gallon of water to run through the hose and found that between 14 and 17 seconds was the norm for a gallon of water. We quickly abandoned counting when you consider we had slightly over 700 roses to water and determined that merely paying attention was adequate to our and the roses needs. Some containers depending on size would receive more water than others.

When to water in most instances should not be a concern provided you are not negligent in providing adequate amounts of water to your roses. Work and family considerations obviously play into the equation of when to water, as does the temperature. We have a tendency during the week to water late in the day and for this reason we are careful not to wet the leaves if we feel that they will not dry out prior to sunset. Note that certain fungal conditions thrive in damp wet conditions. If you happen to notice Black Spot we urge you to not wet the leaves as the fungal spore will quickly spread from water splashing on the leaves. Conversely, during the heat of a summer weekend you can often find us watering from overhead. This has a two fold effect on our roses. Roses have a tendency to accumulate dust and watering from overhead washes them off which results in less time being spent cleaning the leaves prior to a rose show. The other benefit is that of cooling off the rose bush during the heat of the day is highly beneficial.

Another thing we do when we water is to fertilize our roses. Previously, all fertilization was done via a two gallon watering can. At one gallon per large rose bush it doesn't take a bean counter to determine just how many times the watering cans were refilled prior to finishing the job not to mention the six to eight hours of labor that was required each time we fertilized. This was resolved by purchasing an **E-Z Flow** automatic fertilizing siphon from **Rosemania**. This reduced the time devoted to fertilizing and watering from 8 hours down to about an hour and a half affording much more time to do other rose related activities. In order to guard against flushing out the nutrients from the containers we fertilize every time we water.

Our final comment is to get to know your roses as all roses in addition to having similarities have **certain unique characteristics** about them. It takes both time and observation to learn what makes a rose different. Some roses enjoy more amounts of water than others. Certain roses such as '**Whirlaway**' do not like to be over watered and will not thrive if you do this. Other roses have a tendency to thrive with frequent watering. Many exhibitors will water their roses daily beginning a week to ten days prior to a rose show. The only way these unique nuances of certain roses can be understood is to pay attention to your roses. Often we need to make mistakes before we can learn but by paying attention to what causes a rose to thrive will go a long way to making all of us better exhibitors and rosarians as well.

As always, if you have questions regarding this or other articles we have written, please send them to Richard at RJA4CPA@aol.com or Kristine at Beancntr30@wideopenwest.com.