

Are You a Sustainable Rose Gardener?

By Carol Green

I embrace all things rose. Since becoming a rosarian, these glorious plants have brought countless hours of pleasure to my life. However, as with most things, changes in age, economy and life style bring changes in one's interests and availability of time.

When I began growing roses, my goals and expectations were to have a perfect garden.

In those days almost every convention, rose society meeting, and countless articles included information on to how to spray, what to spray, when to spray, and how to dress to keep the spray from harming you. The focus was on achieving perfection in our roses.

Time that might have been spent enjoying the fruits of your efforts was instead spent dealing with constant pest issues and fretting about what in the garden wasn't perfect. Fast forward several years. I and others have moved away from the use of chemicals to treat insects, pest and mites, and only used them as necessary for disease.

My first introduction to the term sustainable (as it relates to rose gardening) came from a publication by the same name. It was prepared by Pat Shanley, Peter Kukielski and Gene Waering, as part of the Great Rosarians of the World East program in 2008. Their paperback publication eventually evolved into a book. The components that make up a sustainable rose garden are similar in many ways to the principals of integrated pest management. Both require that gardeners examine their level of acceptance for imperfections and act accordingly. Both recommend that gardeners have appropriate expectations for the plants they choose based on the time and funds they are prepared to expend. Both encourage a reduction of chemical in the garden allowing naturally occurring agents to survive and perform.

Adding sustainable practices to your gardening can be done at any time and at any stage of a garden's life. It is

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"The idea-the goal- of the sustainable rose gardening movement is to show the way to growing beautiful roses with less pressures from disease and with less effort on the part of the gardener."

Marilyn Wellan

From her Forward to 'The Sustainable Rose Garden', by Pat Shanley, Peter Kukielski, and Gene Waering.

Photo: Garden Direktor Otto Linne

really an all-encompassing change of attitude and actions. You strive to avoid damaging the environment. You seek to limit waste in your garden such as leaky irrigation or faucets. You make sure your roses are well mulched with the knowledge that this will prevent weeds and maintain moisture, thus, reducing water requirements.

Here are a few items to consider if you would like to work toward a sustainable rose garden; one that requires less overall work and chemical use.

- Choose roses that are known to be tolerant of disease in our Central Florida area. This may be the single most important aspect of sustainable rose gardening. A rose that exhibits no blackspot in Arizona may still exhibit a good bit of our heat and humidity.
- Decide how much time you are willing to devote to your roses and plant only what you can handle comfortably. It is a rule we all make ... and break. However, facts are facts. Fewer roses can be maintained far more easily than a large number.
- Plant your roses well, since this will be their home for many years. Part of planning correctly is choosing a location with adequate light, drainage, and space. Good soil is one of the most important criteria of successful and sustainable rose growing. A lovely rose will soon lose its luster in lousy soil!
- Decide how you want to handle pest issues and learn to correctly identify them. It is important to know the difference between damage from spider mites and damage from chili thrips. They are not dealt with in the same way. A mistaken diagnosis can be costly and allow unnecessary damage. Pests include insects, weeds, mites, diseases, and anything that you don't want in your garden. Even Fido is a pest..... if he's digging up your roses.
- The key to handling damage by pests and maintaining the sustainability of your rose is to observe them regularly. Damage of the any kind, found early, can be limited, thus reducing time and effort in eliminating the



problem. An outbreak of certain insects can explode overnight in suitable conditions.

Do not be shy about asking questions or seeking help from successful rosarians.

All were once beginners and have 'been there and done that.' Sustainable rose gardening includes a pleasure component, because it encourages us to spend more time enjoying our gardens and less time dealing with problems. The key is to prevent the problem from even developing where possible. Each of us will evolve as rosarians. Whether you strive for perfection in your garden or take your satisfaction from the views and fragrances that roses provide, try to create a gardening experience that can sustain both you and your roses for many years.

Life provides us with enough stress. Rose growing can, and should, provide relief from that stress.

Carol Green (Carol@bgacranes.com), 'Are You a Sustainable Rose Gardner?' March 2014. *Rose Rambler*, Carol Green, ed., Marion County Rose Society.