

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
By Bill Arndorfer
Grundy County Extension Education Director
November 9, 2007

Even though we are at the end of the growing season there are still a few chores to complete that will prepare your garden and roses for next year. Spending time now to cleanup plant debris and properly protect your roses will pay off in healthier plants next year.

Many of the fungi and bacteria that cause spots, blights and rots of plants survive over the winter in the dead leaves, stems and other plant parts that are left behind in the garden. When warm weather returns next spring those pathogens will come out of dormancy and attack the young plants. Good sanitation is essential for a healthy garden. Raking up and disposing of infected plant debris is an important step in reducing disease next year.

How can you dispose of infected debris? Christine Engelbrecht, Iowa State University Extension Plant Pathologist, recommends composting as an option. Christine says it is important to "have a "real" compost pile that actually heats up to at least 140 degrees F, which will kill most pathogens. Most home compost piles do not reach this temperature, but most municipal composting facilities do."

Another way to prevent plant diseases next year is to record where each type of plant was grown this year, then rotate where each type of plant is placed in the garden next year. This further reduces the chance that new plants will be exposed to this year's overwintered pathogens. A rotation cycle of several years is best to minimize disease but even a two or three year rotation will help.

To prepare your roses for winter, James Romer, Iowa State University Extension Horticulturist, has the following recommendations: Bush-type roses such as hybrid teas, floribundas and grandifloras need to be protected (hardy shrub roses should make it through the winter months with minimal care). Prepare bush-type roses for winter when plants are dormant after exposure to two or three hard frosts. Normally, that is late October to mid-November.

First, remove fallen leaves and other debris from around each plant. Then loosely tie the canes together with twine to prevent the canes from being whipped by strong winds. Extremely tall canes can be cut back to two and a half to three feet; then mound soil ten to twelve inches high around the base of the canes. Place additional material, such as straw or leaves, over the mound of soil after the ground freezes. A small amount of soil placed over the straw or leaves should hold these materials in place.

If using Styrofoam rose cones, prune the canes back to allow the cone to fit over the plant, remove plant debris and mound six to eight inches of soil around the base of the canes. Set the cone over the plant. Finally, mound a small amount of soil around the outside base of the cone to keep it in place. Secure the cone by placing a brick or other heavy object on its top.

Remove protective materials before bud break in spring, normally about mid-April in northern Iowa.

For more information, contact the Grundy Office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.