

IN THE GARDEN

April in the Garden, by Martine LaBelle

I suspect this has happened to all of us at one time or another - either we didn't do all of our winter pruning or we missed some of our roses. It is easy to spot ... the rose has completely leafed out, may even have buds or bloom but there are still bright red or orange hips on the older canes. Instead of wailing and gnashing your teeth just acknowledge what has happened and go ahead and prune the rose. How you plan to approach this task is slightly different. This is not going to be a hard winter pruning.



Instead, the approach is a somewhat kinder and gentler method. Spring pruning still has some of the winter pruning chores such as removing dead canes or canes growing into the middle of the plant, but isn't as heavy-handed at cutting back the canes. Remember - this rose has completely leafed out.

Stand back and look at the general shape of the bush. Does it have some canes that are a lot taller than the rest of the plant? Take a look and find out the source of the canes. If the cane was a basal break that was above the bud union, then go ahead and trim the cane to get the pleasing form that you are going for.

However, if that cane is below the bud union it is the rootstock. In California the most common rootstock is 'Dr. Huey'. The "good doctor" is easy to identify - the shape of the leaves is very different from your rose. Most modern garden roses have oval or roundish leaves, 'Dr. Huey' has long, narrow leaves. Even the coloration is different. Your rose leaves will probably be fatter and darker than the intruder's light green leaves. Hard as it may be, you will need to rip off the 'Dr. Huey' cane. By cutting the cane you encourage more new replacement growth from the root stock.

Continue to walk around the bush looking for any broken canes. You will need to reach in and spread apart the canes looking for anything to eliminate. When you are finished it should not look like a freshly winter-pruned rose that has been denuded of foliage.

At this time of year the aphids are in full force. After you are done pruning - if it is early enough in the day - please use a hose to wash off the aphids and their sticky secretions. Once they are on the ground, beneficial beetles and other insects will catch them.

It is not the end of the world if you miss doing a traditional winter pruning. The down-side is the blooms will not be as large and will be more susceptible to over-wintering disease and other pests.

