

IN THE GARDEN

February by Gregg Cook

You should be finishing up your pruning by now. I started mine in December and am finishing up this week. Some bushes are being pruned for the first time and others are getting a second go-over to shape them properly.

What is a second go-over? When we prune our roses using the tried-and-true methods of removing dead and diseased growth, pruning to an outside bud eye, remove canes crossing back through the middle of the bush etc., we are applying “rules” that will generally give us the results that we want. The highest bud eye left on the cane will generally be the one to sprout first. But if you go back a bit later when the rest of the bud eyes start to expand and grow you may get a different result than what you expected! Our pruning cuts are “suggestions” to the plant.

At this time “finger pruning” comes into play. Finger pruning is when you knock off or rub off new, unwanted growth with your finger. The new, soft growth will come off easily with just a bit of finger pressure – flick it off, or push it off sideways. As you examine your recently pruned bush look at what new growth is actually taking off and starting to grow vigorously. Is it the outside facing bud that you originally cut above? Or is it an inside facing bud a bit further down the cane? Or both? Now is the time to rub off that inside growing bud. If you let it go it will just cause you problems later. By removing it now, that bud that you wanted to grow will get the extra nutrients needed to “do its thing”. Every year when I prune I ask myself “How did all of this tangled mess in the center of the bush happen?” It happens by letting those inside facing bud-eyes develop. Now is the time to do something about it.

Bud-eyes in the old leaf scars usually come in threes. Generally, only one will develop and the remaining two are dormant. But sometimes more than one will take off. It is usually better to gently remove the extra growth with your finger and let just one bud develop. It will be one stronger cane rather than multiple smaller canes that usually grow in multiple crowded directions. Those dormant bud eyes can come into play if for some reason your selected new growth is knocked off or injured. A dormant eye just might take over and give you what you want.

Look at your roses a bit after pruning and picture what they will look like if all that new growth were left to mature. Can you do something now to improve how it grows? Every year when I do the second go-over I find myself asking “What were you thinking?” or “That didn’t work!” I look to see where the “rules” need to be broken or modified. That outside facing bud eye is going to grow into the public sidewalk or path where I need to walk. Is there a better bud eye facing a bit to the side which will work? You can re-cut now to “suggest” a new direction for a new cane.

There is also one special type of bud eye that you can look for now. It is the “basal break”. That is that little eye developing on the bud union or the knot where the canes are coming from at the bottom of the bush on grafted roses. That basal break is the beginning of a new cane which is a treasure. If it develops and grows ... that is the future of your plant. When it matures you can then remove an older cane when you prune next year. Removing old canes that have been replaced by new, young canes rejuvenates your bush. Some of my grafted roses are going on 30 years old and are still going strong because I removed old, grey canes and let the new green ones grow. Why should the rose keep using energy trying to keep the old canes going when that energy directed to new, more productive growth will be much better?



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So, go take another look at your roses and make any changes that may be needed. It is easy to do now and will give your roses a better chance to make you a happy rose grower by growing new canes and producing more and better flowers for you.