

## IN THE GARDEN

### **June** by Royal Krieger

We've now enjoyed a beautiful May bloom. Time for dead heading.

When I dead head, generally cutting a bit above a five-leaf leaf below the bloom, interesting things happen. I'm going to explain this complex process via a simple concept, not scientific detail and terminology. By making the cut I've wounded the plant. "Signals" go to the root system triggering the sending of "healing energy" back to the cut. The cut will soon callus over. This "healing energy" then tends to focus on the bud node at the base of the five-leaf leaf just below my cut. This will stimulate the growth of a new shoot and hopefully more bloom.

So where do we usually want this new bloom? Note the two pictures below. In the first picture my pruners are pointing to the node at the base of the five-leaflet leaf where I will cut just above. The direction the leaf is pointing will tell me the direction of the new cane that should result from my cut. The picture on the right shows a new cane growing in the same direction as the old leaf. This allows me to shape the growth of the plant. Proper dead heading is more than just cutting off the old bloom. To maintain plant health, development and continuation of bloom, the correct dead heading cut may not be just above the first or second five-leaflet leaf as is often taught, but will be lower down the cane.



In addition to dead heading, I want to keep the plant's center open to increase air circulation which helps reduce disease. This also aids the growth of the canes I wish to prosper. What do I mean? Think of the root system as an engine that provides "energy" for plant performance. In general the root system can only produce so much "energy" at

any given time. By removing unwanted canes I've allowed the remaining canes to receive more "energy" that can contribute to more vigorous and productive growth and bloom.

I also remove leaves from the base of the plant to help air circulation and foil spider mites. As we go into the heat of summer, spider mites can do a lot of damage in a short period of time. A few hot days can bring them out in force resulting in the plant's bottom leaves suddenly turning an ugly, dried brown and the undersides will be full of spider webs. Yes, we can blast with water daily or even spray, but why set our roses up for the mites?

Also common this time of year is Powdery Mildew. The ideal conditions for powdery mildew spores are nights with some moisture and around sixty degrees. H-m-m-m, sounds a lot like our Bay Area weather. Some roses are more susceptible than others. The key to PM control is to disrupt the pH of the leaf surface where the mildew wants to grow. This can be as simple as hosing with water in the AM or spraying with baking soda or horticultural oil.

This year's drought challenge will be giving our roses adequate water. I'm a big proponent of making soil berms around my roses. This concentrates the water for the rose and tends to save water from running off the rose bed. Mulching can help though it can make it difficult to keep the ground around the rose free of diseased leaves and debris.

Late June to early July is an ideal time for feeding roses, ideally an organic with approximately equal amounts of nitrogen (N), phosphate (P) and potassium (K), such as a 10-10-10. Be sure to water well a day before fertilizing and again upon application.