

IN THE GARDEN ...

## November in the Garden by Royal Krieger

In our mild climate, we generally think of pruning in January. However, starting in mid-December and finishing up in early March shouldn't be a problem.

Now is a good time to think about transplanting or planting new roses. Although such planting may be done year around in our area, I tend to get better results not doing it in the hotter months between May and October.

### **Transplanting Established Roses -**

Usually moving a rose within the garden is done because the rose's size is a better fit elsewhere or the rose isn't performing where currently located. I've had to move some roses in my garden three times before they were happy. (If it isn't happy after three tries, maybe it's time to meet "Mr. Green Waste Pile".)

Over the years I've observed people rushing the transplanting process. They dig and pull on the rose before it's adequately loosened and then don't leave enough soil to keep the roots covered. That translates to excessive plant shock, a longer recovery, and possible plant death. So, how do I prefer to do it ...

First, I make sure the soil is moist enough to get a shovel into the ground, but not so soft that the soil will readily fall off the roots. It is important to keep the roots covered in soil throughout the transplanting process. In my experience, the more the roots are exposed to air the more transplant shock the rose will experience. Once the soil moisture is right, (this may be a few days from the last watering), I prune the rose more aggressively than normal. I remove all excess canes along with any leaves. However, I make sure to leave enough cane length to comfortably hold on to the plant and remove any prickles (thorns) from the canes I will be grasping. I'm now ready to dig out the plant.

I think of the root system as a reflection of the plant on top. If we could see into the soil we'd see the roots spread out and lots of tiny roots (feeder roots) among the thicker (anchor) roots. It is important to save as much of these roots as possible.

When digging out a rose it seems natural to dig at an angle. I start digging farther out than what I think is necessary and I dig STRAIGHT down. Digging at an angle unnecessarily cuts or damages too many roots. I take my time digging completely around the plant. If I hit a major root while digging I'll let it be and continue digging.

Often the instinct is to dig around the plant and then start to pull on it to see if it's getting loose. Instead, I just keep digging around going deeper and deeper while removing some of the soil. I pile the removed soil not too far from the hole since I'll probably be using that soil to refill the hole. Once I believe I've gone deep enough, I'll start to gently shovel under the plant, continuing to take my time. I want to keep the soil attached to the roots, the "root ball."

As I continue to dig around and under the rose I start to gently lift up on the shovel. The plant should be getting loose. If so, I'll lift with the shovel and start to pull a bit on one of the canes, all moves done gently. This should give me a clue as to where some roots are still holding the plant in place. Some of these will be extending beyond where I have been digging. I will dig out from the plant to save more of those roots. With other smaller roots I'll cut them with the shovel or pruning shears. I prefer the shears since they make a cleaner cut. I continue to gently dig, lifting and cutting roots until the rose comes free. It is important not to rush the process.

Once the plant is free I carefully lift it out of the ground. Depending on its weight, size and distance to the new site, I'll either carry, drag it on a large piece of cardboard or use a wheelbarrow. When transporting I want to be careful not to cause any of the soil covering the roots to dislodge. Some folks wrap the root ball in a cloth to better protect the root ball before moving. I generally don't do this unless I'm moving the plant in a vehicle. Prior to my digging out the rose, I will have prepared the new site by removing all weeds and debris. I do not pre-dig the hole. I do that once the rose ball is set on site. This next step is easier if there is another person to hold the rose in the position and placement I want. This includes spacing to neighboring plants and showing its best side towards the "front".

When satisfied, I trace an approximate outline of the root ball on the ground. Most likely the hole to be dug will not be round but rather a hole with possibly two or three side cuts to accommodate the extra length of major

roots I saved when digging it out. I will dig the hole a few inches deeper than what I think is needed. I dig the sides larger than the root ball, usually around 4"- 6" wider. If I hit compacted clay soil, I dig down a few extra inches and mix the clay with some commercial soil bringing the bottom soil level to the proper height for the setting of the plant. I then do a test placement of the rose in the hole. I may have to do this several times to get the size, shape and hole depth just right.

After the rose is in the hole I put in just enough soil on the sides to hold it in place. I step back and recheck to see if it is still correctly placed. If so, I add more soil but not all the way to the top. I use my finger tips to gently press down the soil along the sides of the root ball. I then pour water around the edges of the hole to further push down the soil just placed. I repeat the process, until the hole is filled. I then gently water the entire root ball. If there is any remaining soil I make a watering berm around the rose.

My final step is to prune any canes/branches that might have been damaged in the transplanting process.

### **Planting New Bare Root Roses -**

Before planting a bare root rose I trim any damaged roots and clean up the canes. I then dig a hole that is approximately one and a quarter times the length and width of the bare roots. I next mix in some commercial soil with the soil I've removed from the hole. Generally, in our Bay Area, the deepest part of a hole will be clay. I put in enough mixed soil to reach just above the longest of the bare roots. I then use a finger to make an indentation for the longest root and add enough soil around the rose to hold it in place, usually covering a quarter of the roots. If a root runs into the side of the hole, I dig into the side of the hole to accommodate the root. I don't want the root to circle against the side of the hole, especially if it is in clay soil. I want the roots to grow into the surrounding earth, not grow like it is in a clay pot. Note that I do not mound the soil to form an upside-down cone and set the roots over this cone. The reason is that most bare root roses don't come with a nice crown root pattern and I've found it's hard to get the soil crown to stay in that cone shape when planting.

Once I think I have the rose at the correct height and facing the right direction and it is supporting itself, I step back to confirm. If it is, I add more soil and gently press this soil with my finger tips, not my fist. I want to compress the soil, but not too tightly, just enough to be sure there are no

large air pockets under the rose's crown. I then add more soil until the hole is three-quarters filled after again pressing the soil in place with my finger tips. I step back one more time to double-check that it's still properly placed. If so, I pour just enough water around the rose to remove any air pockets. I then fill the rest of the hole. The last step is to add more water and admire the result.

Sometimes upon completion I'll see the planted rose is not quite right. The temptation is to say, "Close enough." However, now is the easy time to correct ... although frustrating to redo. I've learned that "close enough" will bug me every time I look at it if I don't fix it.