

IN THE GARDEN ...

## October in the Garden by Gregg Cook

October is a great month for observation and planning. A time for reflection on the previous months in our gardens and our lives. Now is the time to give your roses a real good look and make decisions for the future. They are still in pretty much full growth after a season of growing so we can see how they did during the year. Evaluate their performance in the garden. Do they have disease? Did they bloom well? Are they in the right spot? Do you even like them?

The first thing to ask yourself is if you even like the rose. There are those roses that we fall in love with from pictures in catalogs, the ARS magazine, social media or in someone else's garden. But it didn't work out in our own garden. Is it the wrong color? Or a color that you just don't like? That cannot be changed. If you can't make yourself like it, then it is time to remove it and replace it with something that you like better.

Is the growth habit wrong for your garden? If it is too big, can you move it to a space where it could have more room? If it is too small you might move it to the front of a bed, a sunnier spot or maybe a large pot. Have you tried pruning it differently? I have some roses near the sidewalk in front of my house that easily grow into the path of people walking by. If I let that happen, I am just asking for problems. When pruning time comes, I make my cuts to guide the growth to the side rather than out front. I deadhead the same way. Not the "classic" way to prune and deadhead but it can work to keep an otherwise nice rose. Some roses can be cut back or deadheaded harder to keep them a bit smaller. Give it a try. If it just puts its energy into growing big again it could be time to move/remove it.

What if it constantly has problems? First, identify where the damage comes from. Is it a fungus? An insect? How much damage is there and is it acceptable to you or not. Can you change your horticultural practice to improve the conditions? Generally, you want the leaves to be dry at night so watering in the morning is better than the afternoon. That and sunshine can really help reduce fungus problems. Some insects can be washed off with a jet of water or removed by hand. And if you are open to it there are fungicides and insecticides to help prevent or cure the problem. But you've

got to know what the problem is so the appropriate remedy can be applied. Sometimes that variety is just not a good one for your garden and is a candidate for removal.

Is your rose growing differently than your friend's rose of the same variety? It is possible that it is a bad plant. Some plants are the runt of the crop and just aren't healthy. If everyone else around you has better luck with it and your growing conditions are good for it, you might just take it out and get a new one of the same variety. I grew 'Julia Child' for a couple of years and it never got over two feet tall. All of the other roses around it were great. I dug it up and planted a different rose there that is spectacular. A friend gave me a new 'Julia Child' that didn't work in his garden. Now, in my garden it is one of my favorites and is five feet tall with hundreds of yellow blooms. My first one was just a "bad" plant. Nothing that I could do was going to make it thrive.

Look at your plants and think of how you will prune them later. Can you solve some of the current problems with how you prune it? As I mentioned before, you can guide the direction of growth by pruning differently. When my older plants stop putting out new canes I usually give them a hard pruning. That usually means taking out the old grey canes and bringing down the height. By removing the least productive growth the plant can use its energy to produce new, healthier growth. I have some roses in my garden that are 30 years old and are still putting out new basal breaks. By leaving old canes on the plant there is no room or energy to put out new ones. Now, this may not work 100% of the time. Everything does have a lifespan. The rose across the street from me is probably close to 100 years old now. My mother has one that is almost 70. Others may be ready to be dug up at five or ten years. But try to revive it first. If that doesn't work you can almost always get a new one to replace it if it is one that you must have. Or try a new variety.

Growing roses should be a fun hobby. If you are trying to grow the wrong roses for your garden it can get to be too frustrating and just plain work. By looking at each rose in your garden and deciding if it gives you joy or just more dissatisfaction – and doing something about it - your hobby will be more rewarding. Reach out to your fellow rose growers and consulting rosarians, attend rose society meetings and local shows and demonstrations.

Help for your problems is out there and it is always good to share your successes.