

How to Build A Rose Bed

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Fall is an excellent time to rework the soil or frames in old rose beds as the roses become dormant. Fall is also an excellent time to build a new rose bed. Just think about your situation in the backyard. Have you been thinking about expanding your rose garden? Have you recently moved to a new backyard that is just perfect for a few rosebeds? Do you have too much grass to mow during the year? Did strong winds (or your neighbor's tractor) knock down some trees and open an area of the yard for improvement? All of these are good reasons to build a new rose bed, and the fall is the best time of the year to build your new beds. By building the rose beds in the fall, the soil has time to settle before planting time in the spring.

Picking a Site - The first thing that you have to decide about your new bed is where are you going to put it. Roses need sunlight and the amount of sunlight that an area receives is a critical factor for maximum development. Hybrid teas and other large roses need about 6 to 8 hours of sunlight a day, while miniatures need a minimum of 4 hours of sunlight each day to grow well. Early morning sun and late afternoon shade is the best combination. The early morning sun helps dry the bushes from overnight dew to reduce the incidence of fungal diseases. Afternoon shade helps cool the bushes during the hottest part of the day.

Rose beds also should not be placed too close to trees or shrubs that can rob the roses of their nutrients. Consider placing a new bed in the front yard where everyone can enjoy your beautiful blooms. If deer are a problem, fenced backyards may be your best bet, or other measures (e.g. electric fences) may be needed.

Once you pick a site where you would like to put your new rose bed, you need to check your drainage. Dig a 12" - 18" deep hole and fill it with water. If the water drains out of the hole in less than an hour, you can make an in-ground bed. If the water doesn't drain out in an hour, you can either work to improve the drainage by adding a drainage line along the bed, pick another spot in the yard for your bed, or consider a raised bed. This year we raised four of our miniature rose beds because of poor drainage. It's a lot easier to start with a raised bed if you suspect poor drainage than to have to raise an established bed. So, always check you site carefully for proper drainage.

What size bed should you build?- The size of any rose bed should be determined by the number and type of roses that you plan to plant and/or by the space available. Hybrid tea roses should be planted about 30"-36" apart, floribundas 24"-36" apart and miniature roses ~18" apart. Many of the OGR or shrub roses need to be planted 48" or more apart, depending on growth habit. A quick calculation will let you know how many roses you can plant in the space you select. Also remember to allow for space on each end and sides of the bed for insulation if you are making a raised bed. We try to leave at least 12" between the edge of a raised bed and the bud union of a grafted rose or where the main ground level canes emerge from the soil.

Preparing an in-ground bed - If you find a location with the proper amount of sunlight, away from trees and shrubs, and with the proper drainage, then you can begin to build an in-ground bed. Start by marking the area where you want to build the rose bed and removing the dirt to a depth of from one foot (miniatures) to two to two and one-half feet (large roses). Next, layer some dirt from the hole (or purchased topsoil if the soil from the hole is extremely poor quality), organic material (leaf compost, mushroom compost, peat

moss, etc.), and sand. Roughly 1/3 dirt; 1/3 organic material; and 1/3 sand can make a good combination. We prefer to use mushroom compost as our organic material, but other composted materials (leaves, cow manure, etc.) also work well. Mix each of the three layers together with a rotary tiller (if available) or by shovel (Oh, my aching back!) and start again. You can also mix in some soil amendments (see below) if you want to help enrich the soil even more. Keep building up the layers until your bed is finally a few inches above ground level. Remember that the bed will settle several inches over winter, so initially make it a higher than where you want the final level to be.

Building a raised bed - If your drainage is poor or your yard slopes a great deal, then you might want to consider building raised rose beds instead of an in-ground rose bed. Raised beds place the roses several inches to a foot or more about ground level and help with proper drainage. To make a raised rose bed, you again start by selecting an appropriate location and marking out the outline of the bed. You can then either (1) dig out the bed and layer the dirt/organic material/sand as described for in-ground beds until you reach ground level, or (2) build the frame for the raised bed, and then dig out the hole and begin to build up your layers of soil. If you decide on the first option, then you will build your frame when the soil layering has reached ground level. When the frame is completed, then continue building up the soil until you reach the top of the frame. If you chose to build the frame before you dig out the hole for the bed, then once you start the layering process, you will continue until you reach the top of the frame for the raised bed.

There are lots of different types of materials that you can use to form the raised bed frame. Some materials used for making raised beds include pressure-treated lumber, stone, railroad ties, landscape timbers, and brick. I prefer to use 2" thick pressure-treated lumber. We also have some raised beds where we have simply mounded the soil to the height that we wanted. However, soil will eventually have to be added back to the edges as rain and wind will gradually weather the soil away.

If you prepared the soil to a depth of two feet below ground level, then a frame of 1/2 to 1 foot high is about right, and you can use 2" x 6" to 2" x 12" lumber to make your frame. The frame can also be higher if desired. However, make sure that your raised bed frame is anchored to the ground with spikes or stakes to prevent the frame from shifting over time.

Adding soil amendments - You may want to consider adding soil amendments to the bed when you build it. These amendments can help keep the soil from clumping or add nutrient value. Some commonly used soil amendments are: Perlite to help improve drainage; gypsum to help break up clay soil; organics such as blood meal, cottonseed meal, and fish meal for nitrogen and some trace elements; bone meal or superphosphate for phosphorus; and wood ashes for potassium. We also purchased a new clay soil conditioner product from Schultz to try this year. The conditioning particles look like kitty litter, but don't break down. In contrast to the new clay soil conditioner we are trying this year, many of these amendments will break down over the winter and enrich the soil in nutrients and improve the quality of the soil by planting time next spring.

So, if you are like me, you are probably starting to order more roses than you have spots for in the current rose beds. Those pictures in the catalogs are just too tempting for those of us who have no will power. The only solutions are to take out old roses, hope winter kills a few extra bushes or build a new rose bed. Hmmmm, sounds like it is time for a trip to the garden center and the lumberyard. Now, where is my shovel?

If you are interested in getting more information regarding enjoying your roses, consider joining the Huntington Rose Society. The Huntington Rose Society meets the third Tuesday of the month at the Central Christian Church Fellowship Hall 1202 Fifth AVE, Huntington beginning at 7:30 pm. The Society also publishes 9 issues of a newsletter that contains articles on growing and enjoying roses such as the one above. Membership is \$8 for individuals and \$12 for families. Checks can be made out to the Huntington Rose Society and sent to Bill Dolen Treasurer, 217 Township Rd 339, Proctorville, OH 45669.