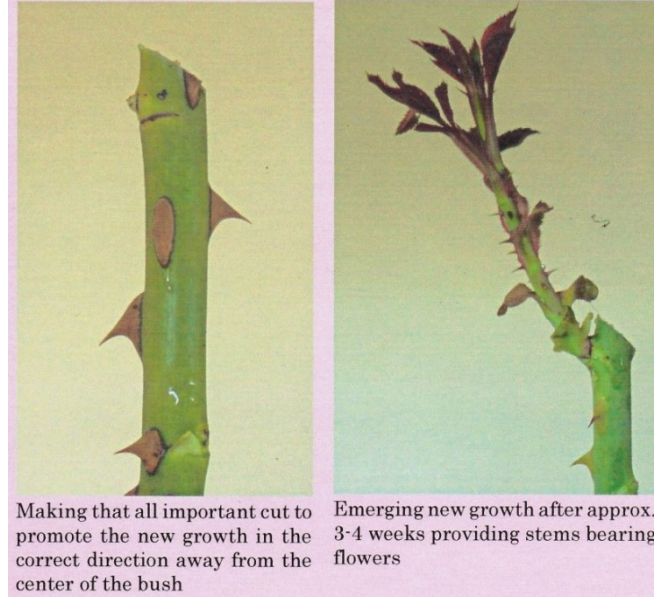


Pruning Heritage Roses – Susan Wade

General comments, as below, may be made regarding the pruning of roses.

- **Pruning Objectives:** Improve Air Circulation, Deadhead for Re-bloom, Shape/Maintenance, Remove Old Canes, Crossing Stems, Weak Wood and Dead, Damaged or Diseased Root Stock.
- **Pruning for health:** Basic rose pruning involves the 3 Ds: removing dead, damaged, or diseased branches.
- **Pruning cuts should be made just above a bud eye.** 'Bud eye' refers to the area on the stem where branching occurs.
- **Once-blooming roses:** Old garden roses that bloom only once-a-year produce flowers on old wood. This is growth that appears the year previous to any blooms it produces. Once-bloomers should only be pruned immediately after they finish flowering (generally early summer – around mid-December). If you prune in winter, you will lose all of that year's bloom. Old garden roses can be pruned to 15 inches every other year without damage. This keeps a large bush within bounds and provides shaping. If you don't mind the size of the bush, then only prune for dead, damaged, and diseased canes or other growth consider undesirable.



Reference for the above information:

<https://www.heirloomroses.com/info/care/how-to/prune/>

Pictures: Courtesy of Dr Tommy Cairns, Editor of *Roses* 90210 – Newsletter of the Beverley Hills Rose Society, USA

- **Repeat blooming or remontant roses:** Repeat blooming roses are pruned in mid-late winter (mid-July in Sydney/mid-August in colder areas which experience frost) and may be summer-pruned in late January/early February to encourage a good autumn flush.
- **More on positioning the pruning cut:** Some references emphasise the importance of positioning the cut (*as shown in pictures above*), whereas others don't.
- **Protective clothing and gloves** are recommended as many heritage roses are very prickly.
- **Be very careful to clean pruning saws and secateurs between pruning each bush.** For weak growers it is particularly important not to transfer any diseases from bush to bush. Die-back can seriously affect some roses. Suggested sterilising methods include dipping pruning tools into one of the following: a solution of one part household bleach to nine parts water, one part tea tree oil to nine parts water, methylated spirits. Discard the sterilising solution safely after use (that same day).
- **To control over-wintering fungus spores** (such as black spot and powdery mildew), after pruning in July it may be advisable to spray with Lime-Sulphur on the bare stems and the soil around the bushes.

Specific guidelines for pruning various types of heritage roses are given by Trevor Nottle.¹

*The information below has largely been extracted from Trevor's most informative book **Growing Old-Fashioned Roses**¹ (which, significantly, is Australian) and in his emailed correspondence to Susan in April 2021.*

Whereas modern roses need to be pruned in late winter to produce an abundance of spring blooms and to take on a good shape, Old-Fashioned Roses can, in most cases, be left alone for years with no harm done; it is almost impossible to kill a rose by not pruning at all for years.

Before pruning any rose, it is imperative that you know its named variety and then check on its class. Refer to the (publicly accessible) *HelpMeFind* (HMF) website www.helpmefind.com/rose/plants.php.² It is not sufficient to just describe a rose as a 'shrub' or 'climber'.

The same rules cannot be applied to all heritage roses, as the various classes have different growth habits and flowering schedule. For example, few wild roses are remontant; notable exceptions are *Rosa chinensis*, *Rosa rugosa* and *Rosa fedtschenkoana*. Amongst other classes, some are remontant and others are non-remontant.

Wild Roses and their Near Hybrids

As a group, the wild (Species) roses and their hybrid offspring require very little pruning as they are by nature moderate to large shrubs and don't need pruning other than to rejuvenate them in their old age.

Before planting wild (or indeed any type of) roses, you should do research/consult catalogues to determine their growth habit and potential size. This may well avoid the following action suggested by Trevor:

If the wild roses you have don't fit the space allocated to them, then the roses should be shifted to where they can attain their natural forms, or be replaced by species which will fit into the spaces available.

Old European Roses – Gallicas, Albas, Centifolias, Mosses and Damasks

The old European roses flower only once per year on wood made the previous year. (Occasionally freakish weather conditions may result in the odd flower appearing out of season.) They are essentially flowering shrubs and form dense thickets of boughs supporting a canopy of twiggy top growth from which a heavy crop of flowers appears in late spring or early summer.

Once the flowers fade a mass of short new growths emerge from just below the dead flower heads and these are the parts which will flower the next year.

Any pruning should be done in summer, after flowering, and should be limited to the removal of one or two of the oldest branches and any dead wood.

Note that Trevor has given a caution about this group: Make sure suckering and running roses e.g. Gallicas and Albas are planted with the bud union above the ground. After 20 years of growing and suckering widely these groups of roses become a real problem to control or remove; best not to risk so much hard digging or poisoning.

Bourbons, Hybrid Perpetuals and Portland Roses

The Bourbons and their other 19th century companions are repeat flowering and they make growth which is similar in size, leafage and prickles to modern roses. The difference which is noticeable and significant is that the canes are much longer. The long canes of these roses allows for several different uses to which they may be put:

1. They may be used as flowering shrubs by allowing them to grow freely in the same manner as the old European roses.
2. They can be treated as moderate climbers to low climbers and trained against walls and trellises.
3. They can be treated as pillar roses whereby the canes are twined around a post or tripod set in the garden.
4. They may be "pegged down". The effect of pegging down is to promote flowering shoots from almost every dormant bud along each of the canes. *For pictures of pegging, this link may be helpful:* www.finegardening.com/article/train-roses-to-produce-more-flowers

Some roses may be self-pegged, by entwining two canes around each other:

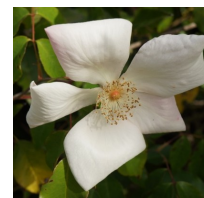
Whichever method of training and pruning you decide to employ, the pruning points remain the same. Each of the canes will grow and produce good flowering wood for up to four years, after which they should be removed completely and their place taken by new growth.

China Roses and Tea Roses

Chinas and Teas usually take a few years to settle in and get established, so for the first few years it is almost unnecessary to do any formal pruning.

China roses will make low but very densely twiggy bushes and any pruning should be light. It is quite possible to simply clip them over into a roughly shaped dome and they will perform well. When water shoots have finished flowering they should be trimmed back to growing eyes below the flower head.

Refer to Glennis Clark's article, **Pruning our Old Teas Roses**, on the HRIA website – <https://www.heritageroses.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Pruning-our-Old-Tea-Roses-1.pdf> **As Glennis concluded:** Remember that Tea roses nearly always resent hard pruning! This is reinforced by Trevor on page 37 of his book: If you try to treat them (Teas) too harshly, the result will be a few-flowered bush that gets a reputation for 'sulking'.



Rosa gigantea
– once flowering
(non-remontant)



Crested Moss,
(Centifolia, 1827)



Boule de Neige,
(Bourbon, 1867)



Mutabilis
(China, before 1894)

Hybrid Musk Roses

Left unpruned, Hybrid Musk roses will form masses of thick growth. Given their dense growth, Hybrid Musks are recommended as informal flowering hedges and pruned as such.

The stems of Hybrid Musks are branched all along their length.

Avoid pruning from the base, just to tidy things up.

Penelope
(Hybrid Musk, 1924)



Rugosa Roses

Their natural habit is to grow low, compact and tight-knit.

Rugosas are the 'no-prune' roses. Their growth is so dense and compact that they require no pruning for years. If used as a flowering bank or hedge (one of their best uses), Rugosas just need clipping into a uniform shape. To ensure hips, take care not to remove too much fruit bearing wood.



Scabrosa (Hybrid Rugosa, 1950)
– flower and hips

Climbing and Rambling Roses

Climbers are a diverse group of roses varying from low shrubby climbers (2.75 m/9 ft) to huge climbers (9 m/30 ft).

For the purposes of pruning, Trevor Nottle has put the Climbers into three categories:

Group 1. Recurrent and Perpetual blooming roses, such as the Climbing forms of Teas, Hybrid Teas, Noisettes and a few vigorous Bourbons and Hybrid Perpetuals.

Winter pruning is the general rule with this group of roses. All spent and twiggy growth should be taken out along with any dead wood and any new basal growth should be shortened back and tied into position against the wall or any support you have. Do not allow the canes to whip around in the wind.

Group 2a. Once-flowering Ramblers such as are usually sold as weeping standards. Facing up to a Weeping standard, for the first time – with its mass of thin, tangling stems cascading from overhead – can be rather daunting.

The following steps for pruning may be of assistance:

- Start by getting inside the bush and removing all the dead canes. You can be quite ruthless if the Weeper hasn't been pruned for years.
- Next work on the live growth. Begin by taking out all twiggy growth right back to the base.
- There should now be long drooping canes at various stages of development, from new shoots with no side growth to those with a well-developed framework of short side-shoots. Look over the whole bush and decide on a balance between the new and older branches. The rest can be cut out completely. The canes which remain can be tied onto the rose ring and the growth cut back to your preferred length.

When a (once-flowering) Weeping Rambler has been rejuvenated, the object is to maintain a balance between the wood that is one, two and three years old – all the rest is unproductive and should be removed.

Group 2b. Repeat-flowering Ramblers can be pruned along similar lines but the summer pruning should be limited to the removal of the oldest canes only; intermediate aged canes can be let alone to produce the second crop of flowers and may then be trimmed again in winter.

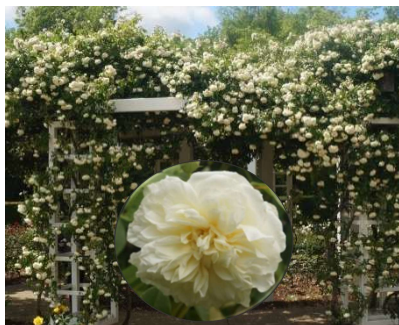
Group 3. Species and allied hybrids are the strongest growing of all roses and cannot be controlled satisfactorily by pruning. So, before planting a wild climbing rose great care should be taken to choose one which will fit into the space you have for it.

The only significant new pruning technique Trevor has seen (since his book was published in the 1980s) is sometimes used in European and English gardens where professional maintenance is the norm. Climbers are taken down from their support frames and completely defoliated before the tangle of canes is carefully 'un-wound'. Pruning is then carried out according to the three year rule described above and the whole plant then very carefully lifted up and tied back on the frame or trellis. The enormous expense of two or three gardeners working for days to prune each climbing rose in this manner for gardens that are open to the public

for an entrance fee, is probably worth it. However, this process may be less relevant for the 'average' Australian home rose garden.

Wild climbing roses should not be pruned other than to take out dead wood. If pruning must be done to keep pathways clear/free gutters etc, prune as necessary; forget about flowers the following year.

Group 1 – Recurrent Climbers Group 2a – Once flowering Ramblers Group 3 – Wild Climbing roses

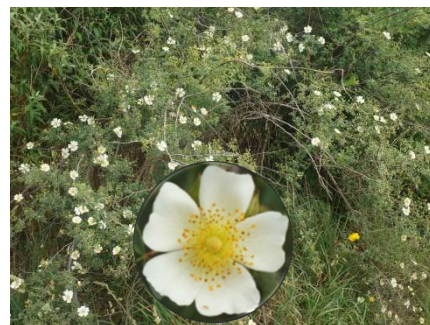


Lamarque (Noisette, 1830)



Albertine (Hybrid Wichurana, 1921)

Note: This specimen is not a weeping standard



Rosa soulieana – a prickly, tall, arching Species rose

Pictured roses have been photographed by Susan at various public and private gardens in the ACT, NSW and Vic.

References

1. Trevor Nottle, *Growing Old-Fashioned Roses*, Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst NSW, 1983, pp. 34-38. (Also 2nd ed. 1995.)
Trevor has advised that this book is long out of print (only second hand copies may be purchased) and that he has been unable to trace the current copyright holder. Susan.
2. *HelpMeFind* is the primary reference for sourcing information about heritage roses. (To obtain further information from *HMF* about a specific rose, click on the links for **Photos**, **References**, **Member Comments** and **Member Journals**.)