



Roses in containers

With today's smaller gardens and busy lifestyles, many people have asked me if roses can be successfully grown in containers or hanging baskets. People with balcony gardens or desperately poor soil, have often dreamed of having a Victorian or cottage rose garden, but thought it was only for the lucky ones blessed with deep fertile ground beds and limitless hours to tend the beds. It would be nice if we all had that luxury, but since most of us must make do with less than perfect situations, container-grown roses provide limitless possibilities toward for our own special rose gardens teeming with fragrance and romance.

All types of roses can be grown in containers. Growing roses in containers is very simple provided you follow a few simple guidelines. Anyone that tries to tell you that a rose is not suitable for container growing just hasn't found the right container yet! Miniature roses are especially well-suited for containers because of their dwarf habit and fibrous root system. Climbers provide an added bonus when pot-grown because they can be grown straight up a support (pillar, trellis) using minimal floor space while adding a height dimension to the garden. I believe it's possible to grow any type of rose in a pot as long as you provide it with a few sensible requirements.

Container roses in six easy steps

1. Choose a large container, with good drainage holes. Bigger containers means bigger, better roses! Roses in larger containers will also over-winter far better than roses in small pots.
2. Use a good commercial potting mix or blend your own rich but fast-draining potting soil. Avoid using large amounts of ordinary garden soil in pots.
3. Water container roses often in hot weather, daily for small pots. Never let them dry out.
4. Feeding in containers is critical. Feed containerized roses with slow-release fertilizer, and liquid organic fertilizers as needed. If you feed too much you can easily burn a container rose, but if you feed it too little it will starve. Garden centres sell many types of slow-release fertilizers that will feed your rose for many months.
5. In the winter, store containerized roses in a protected spot, out of the winter winds and heavy rains. Under large trees or in protected areas on the patio are great locations. For areas that get winter temperatures below -15°C for extended periods of time, bury the pots in the ground or take them into a greenhouse or storage shed for winter. They love a cold resting period, but not prolonged periods of deep freezing.
6. In spring, remove the top three inches of soil from around the rose and replace it with nice compost or a well-rotted manure blended with peat moss or good garden soil. Add a small amount of slow release fertilizer after spring topdressing (see Step 4).

Choosing a container

The container you use can vary with each type of rose, but all containers must have one thing in common: drainage holes. Be creative with deciding what type of container you want to grow your rose in. Containers used can include cedar, traditional clay, worn out tires (beggars can't be choosers) and of course plastic pots. Plastic is not always very fashionable, but it serves the purpose and is inexpensive. Cedar and clay are attractive but need extra maintenance to keep them in great shape. There are many superb looking light-weight pots on the market these days, so have fun checking them all out! Be creative as possible with your pots and, for goodness sake, don't let



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anyone tell you that you pot is not in fashion or dated! It's your rose and your pot, so do as you please! Some of the most praises we've had here at Select Roses were for a full-grown mini climber called 'Jeanne Lajoie' and it was grown in an old worn out truck tire!

Use big containers! Big containers are far more forgiving when it comes to watering and overfeeding! Rule of thumb:

- Use a half oak barrel size for roses such as hybrid teas, climbers or shrubs.
- For mini roses, use two-gallon pots or larger.

The larger the pot the happier your sweet rose will be.

The right soil

When filling pots, I always use a well-aerated but moisture retentive mix. Commercial mixes like Sunshine #4 work well in combination with some compost or garden soil. Be inventive and find a mix that works for you. Plain garden soil is not recommended as it tends to dry out far too quickly, forming a hard cracked surface. We have also had good luck with adding a small amount of composted bark mulch to the mixture for extra drainage qualities. If you already have a favourite potting mix, try it on your the roses; I'm sure they will do well in it. Make sure that it drains well. Extra perlite or composted bark is a great way to help the soil drain.

Fertilizing

I always seemed to run out of steam when it comes time to fertilize baskets or pots, so for myself, the slow-release brands are the greatest invention since sliced bread. If you have a system for feeding your other baskets or pots, use the same for your roses and enjoy the rewards. Slow-release fertilizers are perfect for potted roses, since they release a constant supply of nutrients all the time. Always follow the directions on the slow-release fertilizer packages. Also remember that the amount and frequency of fertilizer is directly influenced by the amount of watering done. A rose grown in a small container that is watered daily will require a steady supply of nutrients to replace all that is lost through leaching. Liquid sea kelp or fish fertilizer can also be used at half strength every two to three weeks depending on how fast the rose is growing.

Watering

Watering in hot weather is crucial if you want to grow great roses. I find potted roses less prone to drying out than fuchsias or impatiens, but daily watering in very hot weather is still needed. Larger planters are much less prone to drying out, so use the largest container possible. During periods of extremely hot weather, try moving small pots to cooler areas with no less than three hours of direct sun. The roses will be fine in a shady area for a temporary period and the blooms will last much longer. Move them back into the sun when things cool off. If your plants are under a roof or beneath trees, remember to water even when it's raining. If the pot is in an area that has bottom or reflected heat, try cluster pots together so the outer ones will keep the root area of the inner pots cooler. Roses are not big on hot roots so tiny containers on hot decks are not a great plan.



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Pest control

One of the nicest things about container roses is their ease of handling, especially where bad bugs are concerned. The plants can be raised, lowered or turned as you please to examine them for chews and tears. Any insects found on the plant can be easily hosed off with a strong blast of water. Splashing water under the leaves helps to prevent spider mites and contrary to common belief, water on the leaves will inhibit the growth of powdery mildew. Fungicides can be applied if you don't like looking at a few spotted leaves.

Mixing in other flowers

Roses seem to grow best alone in containers, but if you choose non-invasive annuals or bulbs, you can extend the blooming period of your rose by a few months. The larger the container you use, the more choices you will have for companion planting. If you have a large cedar tub with a hardy shrub rose in it, you can easily plant a few spring bulbs around the base of it, and then add some cascading annuals to fill out the base in summer. Winter pansies are a simple but useful flower to extend the blooming season of your container roses. Once the rose leafs out and starts to put on a show, it is advisable to trim back any other plant that is crowding the rose. If you're not sure if the combination will work, just try it and see what happens. If your rose isn't happy, it will be the first one to cry out for help, and you can remove the competition.