

KENT'S COLUMN – August 2007: It seems a long time since we were last together, and a lot has been happening in the rose world. We all probably have lost a few roses as a direct result of the “Easter Freeze of 07.” Not only did we need to replace some bushes, hopefully only a few, but a lot of extra work was created. Here is where we stand right now, based on what’s happening in my gardens. The bushes are about half the size as usual and have only produced one rather sporadic bloom cycle. It may be late fall or even next year before things are back to “normal.”

1. Because they are weakened due to the freeze, blackspot and rust have hit quickly and very hard. I have been spraying every week, not two weeks, and changing chemicals every spraying. Manzate type sprays seem to be getting the best results. It is important to use a “spreader-sticker” such as Indicate 5 with your spray for good coverage by the protectant-type (non-systemic) sprays. Hi-Yield also has a spreader-sticker. Work in the early morning in this intense heat. Very obvious dull brown leaves with no black spot indicated are usually chemical burn!

2. Spider mites are rampant. I am thoroughly convinced that the intense water wash is the best weapon. Do this at two or three day intervals for about three or four washings. Prepare to get wet, but you should be without mites for several weeks.

3. Japanese Beetles really do seem to be fewer in number this year. Misting rose buds with a squeeze bottle of Talstar mix works wonders. This chemical costs \$55 for a quart at Southern States. The last bottle I had lasted three years. The same process also works really well on thrips. Do it every morning or evening, or both, if possible. Of course, once a beetle lands and takes the necessary bite for a chemical to kill him, the damage is already done. The Talstar seems to act to deter them from landing. High percentage Orthene does the same thing and is also available at farm stores. The Cucumber Beetle will be arriving soon to join other pests we must endure or fight ... or both!

4. In the long run, the two most important weapons we have for making healthy, strong roses are food and water. It is time now for the mid-summer heavy feeding. I mix a concoction of garden fertilizer, nitrogen) because the plants are not good sized), Mills Magic Mix, Magnesium Sulfate, and alfalfa meal. About two cups around each bush, scratched into the soil and watered down, will feed them until fall cut-back. I do continue to feed them a bit of water-soluble natural food such as Montys, Peters, Miracle-Gro, Mills Easy Feed, etc. every week until early November.

5. Roses need a lot of water. That makes everything else work. The books talk about inches of water per week. That’s too difficult to measure or compute. I think in terms of gallons. In this heat and drought, I try to give each plant a gallon of water every two days. My modern watering system of one rosarian at the end of a hose counts out a gallon (thousand one, thousand two, etc., up to twenty) of a medium volume stream at each plant.

In closing, I guess it seems that we never catch up trying to overcome our problems with our rose growing. But when I get discouraged I sometimes walk through my garden and when spying that one especially beautiful and perfect rose among all the bugs and yellow leaves, I am prone to say this little prayer from the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer:

*O heavenly father, who hast filled the world with beauty;
Open our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works;
that, rejoicing in thy whole creation,
we may learn to serve thee with gladness.*