

- **Should I prune my rambling rose & if so, when?**

Sometimes it can be hard to distinguish between a climbing and a rambling rose and it is important for pruning technique to make sure you know which type of rose you have. The easiest way to tell the difference is to take note of the flowering time. A climbing rose will repeat-flower almost all summer, while a rambling rose flowers only once, normally around June. Rambling roses produce an abundance of small flowers in large sprays, sometimes up to 20 blooms per stem for several weeks and have long flexible stems which emerge from the base of the plant. Climbing roses produce a profusion of large, single, or clustered flowers, are repeat bloomers, and have rigid stems.

Pruning ensures that plants continue to grow vigorously and flower well each year. Rambling roses can become a tangled mess of branches with very few flowers as many stems grow up to 20 feet high and 8 to 15 feet wide each year. For older rambling roses that have been in your garden for a few years annual pruning is an important task. For very heavy pruning wait to December or January when all the foliage has dropped which makes it much easier so see what you are doing. As rambling roses bloom on new growth or the current year's growth it is too late to prune these roses after mid-winter, as your plant will then begin to produce shoots and buds for the year ahead. If you prune after January or February, you risk damaging and disrupting your flower display for the next year.

Before reaching for the pruning shears, it is a good idea to have a plan of what you want to cut and what you want to keep. Once you have an idea of the shape you want, or where you would like the rose to grow, you are ready to begin.

Select and cut some of the old woody stems to the ground, retaining a maximum of six young, vigorous stems that can be secured to supports. Saw away any dead stumps at the base of the plant where rain can collect and encourage rot. All remaining stems should be cut to the base or just above a leaf node. For the stems you want to keep, it is good to minimize their height. If you bring the height down to the first branch this will encourage blooming lower down on your plant. Next prune unhealthy stems including those which are dead, dying, or diseased. You can usually determine if a stem has died simply by looking at it. Dying stems are usually shriveled and either dark brown or black in color. If you are unable to tell where the dead wood ends and the live wood starts, gradually cut back the dead wood until you reach a point where the center of the trimmed stem is completely white, with no brown or black in sight. Weak, thin stems smaller than the radius of a pencil are also considered unhealthy and should be removed. Use a sharp cutting tool such as secateurs, or a pruning saw for larger stems, and cut at a 45-degree angle. Shorten any side shoots on the remaining thicker stems by one-half to about six inches, ensuring that there remains one or two leaf nodes on each shoot which will encourage new, bushy horizontal growth. Remove any leaves that remain. Finally tie in the remaining thick stems in the direction or shape you want using supports such as twine or tape to a structure which provides plenty of support for the windy fall and winter months. Remember that after all this pruning climbing roses are vigorous!

You can deadhead faded blooms before they drop, but doing so is not strictly necessary for climbing roses. The rose hips are considered part of their appeal, and deadheading will remove these hips. You may opt to just brush away the spent petals with your hands and leave the hips intact. If you do decide to deadhead, snip off the spent bloom just beneath the rose hip, cutting the stem at a 45-degree angle.

Finally, remove and dispose of any dead plant material both from the plant and from the ground and rake up any fallen leaves. Any diseased plant material should be added to your green waste collection and taken away. Make sure the soil is well draining and that the roots are not sitting in soggy soil. If needed, improve the drainage of the soil by adding sand and top-dress with compost. Amend the soil every two years by applying and lightly working in a top-dressing of composted material around the base of the shrub for nutrition. Avoid overhead watering.

Sources:

Royal Horticultural Society “Rose Pruning: Rambling Roses”

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/roses/rambler/pruning-guide>

Clematis and Climbers, David Gardner Doris Kindersley Publishing 2007, “Pruning and Propagation”

Homes & Gardens “When and how to prune rambling roses from late summer – for healthy plants and abundant blooms next year.”

<https://www.homesandgardens.com/gardens/prune-rambling-roses>