

# Winter Protection for Roses: Everything You Need to Know

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Since many roses can be damaged by temperature fluctuations during the winter months, now is the time to protect your roses for the winter. Applying winter protection is easy and involves just a few basic steps, but to insure that your roses survive the winters here in southern New England, first consider these factors:

- Make sure the roses you planted are winter hardy for our area. Rhode Island and southern New England are in Zone 6, but different microclimates may exist even within the same neighborhoods.
- Take into consideration where your roses are planted. Are they planted in a protected area, such as against a wall or side of a house, or in an open, windy spot where they will need more protection?
- Keep in mind that the overall condition of your roses is key to their survival through the winter. Healthy roses that were watered and fertilized throughout the season and kept free from disease and insect damage will weather our winters more successfully than those that were neglected.

**So what should you do to safeguard your roses for the winter?** Answers to the following ten most frequently asked questions about winter protection cover everything you need to know to succeed in protecting your roses from whatever winter brings.

### 1. Why do I need to add winter protection for my roses?

Roses generally need winter protection in areas where the temperature goes below 25 degrees. The biggest misconception is that we add winter protection to keep roses warm through the cold winter months. That is not the case. Roses need to be kept **cold and dormant** as well as protected from winter thaws. It is important to keep roses insulated, in a “cooler” of sorts, in order for them to stay dormant. Winterkill most often results from the freeze/thaw cycle experienced during our winters.

### 2. When should I apply winter protection?

The traditional answer is right after the first frost. Since that varies year-to-year, and even area-by-area depending on the microclimate of your garden, target mid to late November – Thanksgiving weekend is ideal. Don't winterize your garden too soon. If you add winter protection too early it will keep the soil warm and delay roses from becoming dormant.

### 3. Is it true I should prune my roses down to 12 inches in the fall?

No. Pruning roses in the fall only encourages the plant to develop new growth prone to winter damage. Just prune out dead, diseased and damaged canes as well as long canes that may break by whipping winter winds. Heavy pruning should be done in the spring.

### 4. When should I stop feeding my roses?

Stop fertilizing sixty days before the first frost. In our area that means the last feeding should be given around the beginning of September.

#### **5. How do I protect roses for winter?**

Since diseases can winter over in the fallen leaves, make certain that the foliage in the rose beds is picked up and discarded in the trash. Also water your roses before adding winter protection. Then hill up the base of each plant to a height of 12 to 15 inches using horse manure, mulch, shredded oak leaves, compost, or even seaweed. In the spring simply push the mounds away from the base of each plant and spread the material used into the rose bed to enrich the soil. This method protects the canes inside the mound and the bud union that should be planted two inches below the soil.

#### **6. Is snow bad for my roses?**

No, snow is an excellent insulator for roses. In addition to keeping the temperature underneath from falling too far below freezing it also prevents the temperature from rising too high above freezing so quickly that the plants break dormancy and start growing. Snow also acts as protection from the winds that can desiccate the rose canes.

#### **7. I followed all the steps to protect my roses and they still died. Why?**

If you followed all the basic steps of applying winter protection and your rose bushes still did not survive the winter the problem may be that they were not healthy going into the winter. Ask yourself the following questions: Did you water and feed them well enough and often enough during the growing season? Were they diseased or damaged by insects? Were your varieties appropriate for the zone in which they are planted? Also, make certain that the bud union was planted two inches below the soil line.

#### **8. How do I protect climbers?**

If the climbers you planted are hardy for Zone 6 then they should survive with the normal amount of protection that your bushes get. Make sure to mound up the base of the climber with 12 to 15 inches of compost, manure, or mulch. Tie the canes to the structure, such as a trellis, or tie them together vertically to protect them from being broken by the wind. If you want to add more protection you can wrap the canes with burlap, tying them securely.

#### **9. Do I have to take mini roses inside?**

No. Miniature roses grow on their own roots and are quite hardy. You can protect them by using the method described in question 5 or just rake leaves over them.

#### **10. What do I do with roses planted in containers?**

First make sure your roses are planted in plastic pots since terra cotta and ceramic pots will crack if frozen. Bury the containers in mulch, wood chips, leaves, or whatever material you have available, to protect the plant's roots as well as its bud union. If you have a garage or shed, you can winter your container roses there, but remember to water them periodically to keep the roots moist.

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