

Why Aren't My Roses Blooming?

Q: My roses hardly bloomed at all this year. They are healthy and have nice green leaves, but few blooms. What happened?

A: Just like vegetables, our ornamentals require the right balance of nutrients to produce fruit or, in this case, flowers. If your plant is generally healthy (good color, leafy and disease-free) then this sounds like you are using a fertilizer that is providing more nitrogen than potassium or potash. Or possibly, your soil is naturally low in potassium or potash. Check the numbers on your rose fertilizer to see if they are relatively balanced, such as 4-3-2. Remember from last week's question that the first number on the fertilizer label is the percentage of nitrogen. You might need to change to a fertilizer that has less nitrogen and more phosphorus and potash, say one like 3-5-3.

According to UT publication "Lime and Fertilizer Recommendations for the Various Crops of Tennessee," apply one-quarter cup of 10-10-10 fertilizer yearly starting on March 15 then monthly thereafter through August for soils that are low in phosphorus and potash. And as always, follow the directions on the label of commercial blended rose fertilizers if you choose to buy those. Too much fertilizer or fertilizing too often may permanently damage your plants.

Fertilizer spikes are also a good option if you tend to forget to regularly feed your roses (like me). Place them around your rose bushes in the spring and let them do the feeding for you all summer. Again, please read and follow the instructions on the package.