

Rose Maladies

By Susanna Barry, Master Gardner

Like making good choices in life, the challenges we choose are what build character and contribute to our personality as unique individuals. Growing a healthy rose is one of my personal challenges. My progress has been slow and fraught with diverse types of rose maladies. It is with passion and determination, with little gain and more loss, that I share my experience. To address my challenge, I consulted a co-worker with 40 years of experience. He shared, “Roses are like people. They both need time, care, and attention.” David currently has sixty thriving roses.

First, let us examine basic information about roses. There are seven main classifications of roses: hybrid tea, floribunda, grandiflora, climbing, miniature, shrub, and old garden roses. The American Rose Society (ARS) classifies the roses we commonly purchase today as modern roses.

Rose growers create most modern-day roses by grafting hearty disease resistant rootstock with preferred flower varieties, forming a union or crown. They have recently been creating more own-root type roses propagated from cuttings. The difference is that over time the grafted rose may return to the original rootstock type rose. So now your large yellow rose has become a small red wild rose. It is important to plant your grafted rose according to your growing zone. Zone 6 and 7 for our area requires the graft to be at ground level.

Four years ago, I chose a lovely grafted, hearty, disease resistant peach color bud opening to a delicate white petaled fragrant rose. The first year five to ten sturdy, healthy, lovely canes emerged and bloomed. The second year, new canes emerged, and old growth canes grew longer creating a dense canopy covered with spring roses. Neighbors often paused to admire this prolific climber.



This was not my first time feeling successful at growing roses. I planted two large hybrid tea roses, one yellow and one pink. They grew, bloomed and I let them do their thing. I had young children and was busy living life. The roses eventually got sick and then the bud crown was gone and the flower that blooms today is from its rootstock.

This begins the list of maladies of caring for roses. A chart at UT Extension’s website displays sixteen different diseases. I searched East Tennessee and all our surrounding states and found the

common diseases that occur in our region are black spot, powdery mildew, and rose rosette disease (RRD).

Black Spot

Black spot is a disease caused by the fungal pathogen *Diplocarpon rosae*. The spores of *D. rosae* are responsible for initiating infections. This fungus appears and acts like mildew, forming black spots on leaves and purple to black spots on canes. Warm wet seasons with rain and humidity can create the perfect environment for this fungus.

Powdery Mildew

Powdery mildew is a disease caused by the fungal pathogen *Podosphaera pannosa*. This fungus appears as white, powdery growth on leaves, leaf stems and flower buds. It causes leaves to blister and twist. This fungus thrives in warm, humid environments.

Rose Rosette Disease (RRD)

Rose rosette disease is a virus. The RRD virus is fatal to roses and there is no cure. The virus spreads by a microscopic mite with a specific appetite of the host genus *Rosa*. The eriophyid mite (*Phyllocoptes fructiphilus*) travels by wind from infected plants to healthy plants, begins to feed and transmit the virus.

Sadly, my prolific white climber mentioned above became infected with RRD. I noticed abnormal growth, then learned common name for RRD is witch's broom. My climbing rose had developed multiple reddish shoots between the main canes and the rose stems. The shoots resembled a rose stem cluster with red foliage. The clusters were not firm like a healthy stem; they were flimsy and flexible.



The infected plant must be removed, root ball, dead leaves and all. Place a large plastic bag over the canes and root ball, cut the canes off the root ball to make it easier to handle, tie the bag off,

and dispose all of it in trash. DO NOT compost any part of the plant. Sanitize your tools and gloves afterwards with 70% isopropyl alcohol or one part bleach and nine parts of water. If using bleach, rinse tools thoroughly to prevent corrosion.

Prevent disease by choosing plants found to be resistant to both black spot and powdery mildew. Conscientious gardeners can also remedy black spot and powdery mildew disease by paying attention to good garden hygiene and sanitation. If a rose is badly infected, apply fungicide. Remember to deadhead and remove debris. Using sanitized tools, prune stems back to allow air flow through the main stock. Keep tools sharp for a clean, neat cut. Use caution when transplanting and avoid a location where a diseased plant grew. See Resources for more information on prevention and treatment of common rose diseases.

Roses add beauty to our gardens and can be a fun hobby. You can grow your dream rose. I have two new climbers to learn from. Wish me luck!

Resources

“Rose Diseases: Identification and Management,”

<https://plantsciences.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2021/11/UT-Extension-Rose-diseases-Identification-and-management-W833.pdf>

“Early Detection of Rose Rosette Disease,”

<https://rutherford.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/200/2020/11/Early-Detection-of-Rose-Rosette.pdf>

“Rose Rosette Disease a Quick Overview,”

<https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2024/12/W1284.pdf>

“Rose Diseases,”

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/rose-diseases/>

“The Plant Doctor Black Spot, Cercospora Leaf Spot, and Powdery Mildew of Roses,”

<https://extension.msstate.edu/sites/default/files/publications/publications/p2827.pdf>

“Fight ‘big four’ rose problems with prevention strategies,”

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/news/fight-big-four-rose-problems-prevention-strategies>

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