Winter 2018 Edition

EC Landscape News

WINTER ROSE CARE

With over 14,000 varieties to choose from, roses are a popular focal point for gardens and landscapes. They have been used throughout several of our communities for focal points, accents, and entry ways.

Three of the most popular roses are *Rosa floribunda* 'iceberg', R. x Noare 'flower carpet rose', and R. *floribunda* 'trumpeter'. These varieties have proven to be favorable choices due to their resistance to disease, low maintenance needs, and their success in full sun exposure. They are also fast growing, hardy, and are drought resistant.

Roses perform best when given routine care and attention, such as regular feeding and occasional deep watering. Regular watering can be reduced to twice a week in the winter, with shorter run times. We monitor soil moisture conditions to make sure the soil has not become dry, especially if it has not rained in a while. Although roses are tolerant of dry conditions, it is important to keep the soil moist.

While most roses are deciduous, the varieties mentioned above behave as evergreens because of our mild climate, putting out new growth and flowering most of the year. They are vulnerable to a hard frost, however. Winterization practices are still necessary in order to ensure maximum productivity.

Unlike other rose varieties, deadheading in preparation for winter is not necessary. Cut back one-third to two-thirds of the plant for resizing or shaping in late December and into January. This will help stimulate dense new growth in the spring.

PRUNING for WINTER

Pruning is a major component of our landscape maintenance program. The benefits of pruning include maintaining the health and appearance of the trees and plants as well as promoting new growth. To maintain a plant's health requires the removal of dead, dying, or diseased wood (limbs, branches, and shoots), which can also be entry points for insects and diseases. Pruning also rejuvenates shrubs and trees and helps younger plants in their formative stages by establishing their shape.

When to prune largely depends on what the purpose is for pruning, which requires knowledge of the tree or shrub's specific pruning needs. The most common reasons for pruning are for maintaining plant health and managing the size and shape of the tree or plant. While light pruning can be performed almost any time of the year, large-scale pruning is best performed in the late fall and winter months when plant growth has slowed and/or the plants have entered dormancy. This helps to ensure and promote a vigorous burst of new growth in the spring.

TREE PRUNING

Proper pruning of trees is essential in developing a strong structure and a desirable shape. Improper pruning can cause permanent damage. Light pruning is often performed by qualified landscape maintenance professionals and is restricted to what can be reached from the ground. This often includes overhanging and dead branches. Anything beyond light pruning should be performed by a qualified tree professional, under direction of a certified arborist. This reduces the potential for damage to the tree and helps to ensure its health and future. Tree professionals are trained, experienced, and are equipped with the proper tools.

Pruning deciduous trees should be avoided while they are losing their leaves in the fall. Pruning during this period could cause trees to react in a way that expends energy that is needed to be stored for producing new growth in the spring. Therefore, it is best to prune after the trees have already lost their leaves and gone dormant. Evergreens and conifers should only be pruned during the late fall and winter months after the trees have gone dormant. Pruning at this time helps to reduce the potential for disease and insect infestation.

SHRUB PRUNING

In the same way that pruning is beneficial to the health and quality of tees, pruning shrubs also helps to promote plant growth, encourages flower development, maintains a plant's health and size, and improves the plant's aesthetic qualities. As a plant matures, it often produces smaller blossoms or flowers. Pruning can divert energy away from the branches and redirect it toward the production of larger flowers.

Overgrown and mature shrubs often lose their shape and become unsightly and unappealing. However, they can be restored by performing major pruning, called hard pruning or heading back, during the winter months. The process involves shortening the length of branches back to a bud or the next side branch. This will promote new, denser growth in the spring and will bring back their visual appeal. Lightly pruning young shrubs will also help them to grow fuller and denser.

Hard pruning also works with plants that consist of several stems or branches arising directly out of the ground. The technique involves cutting back branches, stems, and flower stocks down to between 2" to 6" above ground level.

Not all plants however, tolerate hard pruning. Our staff is knowledgeable about the growth and shape patterns of the plant materials used in our area. They also have years of experience applying the methods described above to ensure customer satisfaction, together with providing an appealing final product.

SMART CONTROLLERS:
Interfacing with the Human Touch

The task of adjusting watering schedules to meet current weather conditions is as old as the landscape industry. Through technology the use of smart controllers have been introduced as a means of managing landscape irrigation more efficiently. Smart controllers are *designed* to adjust watering schedules *automatically* in response to changes in the weather. These types of systems have been proven to increase efficiency and save water. However, they do not completely eliminate the need for monitoring by irrigation and landscape specialists.

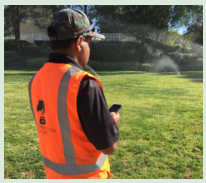
There are 2 basic means in which a smart controller obtains the information needed: sensor-based or weather based.

- **Sensor-based:** Receive information from soil probes, and directs the controllers to adjust based on the current soil moisture. Soil probes are installed near each controller and thus, only obtain data in the vicinity of that controller. The data does not represent the conditions for all the stations covered by the controller. It is costly to install sensor probes throughout all the common areas, as they are wired directly into the controller.
- **Weather-based:** Receive daily evapotranspiration (ET) data from remote weather stations closest to the project site. Based on the data download, directs the controllers to adjust based on the previous day's ET water loss. The majority of smart controllers use data that is gathered from the previous day's events and is not representative of current conditions, which would explain why you might see sprinklers running during a rain event.

Although several smart controller products store past weather data, the information is not as accurate as real-time data. To maximize plant watering needs with greater accuracy, the controllers would have to be able to predict the weather. While we do not pretend to be meteorologists, we do rely on information from weather experts to manually adjust watering schedules in advance of forecast rain or extreme temperature events.

The degree of efficiency and how much water is saved through the use of smart controllers is dependent on a multitude of factors, including the age, efficiency of the irrigation system, and as of recent years, the impact of water restrictions. Conversion of overhead irrigation to drip systems, along with the replacement of turfgrass with drought-resistant plant materials, is another factor to consider.

We have assisted several of our communities with the design and installation of numerous turf reduction projects, with favorable results. Managing the water needs of plants with smart controllers in these types of landscape settings becomes challenging without constant system monitoring. Tasking staff to measure soil moisture levels in all areas, including those with drip irrigation, is critical for the health and productivity of all plant materials.

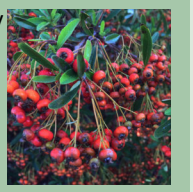


Our site supervisors and irrigation technicians are well-trained and have experience in horticulture and water management. These skills and experience are critical in managing controller-adjusted irrigation schedules and water quantities are satisfactory.

Several of our team members have obtained certifications in water management through leading trade organizations and water districts. Various members of our team hold the following certifications: Certified Water Manager, Recycled Water Site Supervisor, Water Specialist Consultant, Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor, and Certified Landscape Irrigation Technician. Ongoing education is required to maintain these certifications.

Environmental Concepts recognizes the importance of maintaining a balance between the quality of the landscaping and the water budgets of the communities that we serve, while working with our clients to implement their goals for water and landscape management.

PYRACANTHA



Second only to the *Poinsettia* for expressing the spirit of the holiday season, the *Pyracantha* bush, common name *firethorn,* is known for its clusters of red-orange berries. The 'fruit' of the *Pyracantha* are actually not berries at all, but are *pomes*, which means apple or apple-shaped.

The *Pyracantha* plant is a fast-growing evergreen shrub and a popular choice to brighten up any garden. They range in size from groundcover and low shrubs to trees and shrubs that can reach 5 to 10 feet in height.

The plants are hardy, tolerate full sun, and survive both cold temperatures in the winter and hot temperatures in the summer. *Pyracanthas* also tolerate dry or semi-moist soils. Care should be taken however, to not over-water.

Pyracanthas can be enjoyed year-round with their small creamy white flowers appearing in the spring and early summer that ripen into a red-orange fruit lasting well into the winter months. With an abundance of fruit, they are also a valuable food source for wildlife.

Little maintenance is required and they can be trimmed any time of the year. Hard pruning however, reduces their fruit productivity. They perform best when allowed to follow their natural growth habits.

We have found that *Pyracanthas* are an excellent choice, based on their hardiness, ease of maintenance, and low watering needs. Their dense, thorny structure makes them an effective impenetrable barrier. They have been used as a low-growing groundcover in several of our communities, as well as a method of protecting slopes and other areas from pedestrian traffic.

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