



Tips for Growing Climbing Type Roses By Jim Wagner

While at the E.M. Mills Rose Garden recently, former Syracuse Rose Society president Pam Dooling asked me to share some of my thoughts in caring for climbing roses, whether they be the type grown at home like the three growing outside my cluttered home office or the more than 100 climbing roses at the Mills Rose Garden in Syracuse, NY.

Many questions can arise such as: Is any rose that likes to climb several feet always classified as a "Climber"? Or is it classified as something else such as a Hybrid Kordesii that is classified as a "Shrub" rose?

If you happen to visit the E. M. Mills Memorial Rose Garden and look Northwest toward the SU Dormitory from the gazebo, to your immediate left you will see Clair Matin which is along the pathway of Sections A

and B. Clair Matin is a pink rose classified as LCI or Large Climber. Then to your right, you will find William Baffin, HKor or Hybrid Kordesii. Both Clair Matin and William Baffin have Climber on their name plate.

Although Clair Matin and William Baffin have different characteristics, both climb up their respective trellises. But if you refer to the ARS Handbook for Selecting Roses, under "Modern Roses Climbers" (page 20), you will find Clair Matin yet no mention of William Baffin as a climber.

William Baffin is found under the "Shrub" classes. William Baffin is classified as a Shrub because it has a large mass of blooms in June and only an occasional bloom the rest of the season while Clair Matin has continuous blooms from June until late fall. Sometimes Clair Matin is still blooming when it's being covered with burlap in early November.

These tips are for Climbing Type roses as you may find that there some varieties that like to climb are not classified as Large Flowered Climber roses.

Clair Matin, William Baffin and several others that have repeat blooms should be deadheaded once their bloom becomes an unattractive spent bloom. But varieties like Veilchenblau which has a very attractive mass of long-lasting mauve cluster-like blooms in June and does not bloom again the rest the season does not need deadheading.

Deadheading tips

For roses that either provide blooms all season or just have an occasionally repeat bloom like Clair Matin and William Baffin:

*After a given bloom is past its bloom cycle, the canes should be cut back to a quarter inch above their second or third leaf set. But contrary to other modern type roses such as Hybrid Tea roses (which are deadheaded after each bloom cycle and cut back in the fall), most climbing roses should not be cut back.

Getting more blooms

The blooms come from new shoots from the 4 to 6 strongest canes. But if you have a wall or chain link fence, you may want to consider "Espalier" or a "Standard Rose" technique where the canes are allowed to spread out along a wall or fence resulting in an entirely different view from a climbing rose tied to a trellis.

Tips on planting climbing roses

Whether you order bare root roses from Palatine for planting next month or buy potted climbing roses from nurseries next spring you may want to consider the ideas below.

1. Select a site that gets a minimum of six hours of sun, preferably early morning to mid- afternoon as some varieties may suffer burning on the edge of the bloom in the late afternoon sun.
2. Decide whether you would like a single trellis with just one bush or a set of trellises that you can walk under and where two roses can meet at the top center of two trellises facing each other
3. After selecting the rose or roses you would like, consider adding some form of soil improvement such as Pro-Mix, compost or manure, and dig a hole as least 18 to 20 inches deep.
4. Add a cup of Bone Meal and a couple shovels of amendments, and mix with native soil in the bottom of hole.

5. Upon arrival of your bare root roses from Palatine next month or when potted roses become available next spring, check the roots and remove any damaged roots and if there are any canes crossing over each other, remove the weaker cane that is crossing over the stronger cane.

6. Put the bush into the hole with the roots spread out over a soil mound and the Bud Union about two inches below ground level and fill about half way with soil. Water deeply. Then fill the hole the rest of the way, gently tamping the soil and water again. Then make a several inch mound above the soil line to hold the moisture while the roots get established and new growth begins. Then over a two- to three-week period gradually remove the mounded soil and keep the newly planted rose watered well all season.

7. Now that your rose is in the ground, it's never too early to start thinking about a good program of periodic fertilizing plus taking whatever measures you feel comfortable with to control diseases and insects. For fertilizing, I prefer adding 10-10-10 granular fertilizer about three times a season –around Mother's Day, around Father's Day and late July. Supplement this with a water-soluble fertilizer such as Miracle-Gro Rose Food at least once and preferably twice in between the granular fertilizing. But you may want to follow a different routine including possibly using an organic granular fertilizer such as Rose Tone. If you use the latter it is best to start applying this in early to mid-May and monthly through late July as the feeding value of this is about 30 days vs. 60 days for the 10-10-10 granular fertilizer. If there has not been at least an inch of rain in recent days, water deeply before fertilizing and do the same after if it does not rain within a few days after.



As I write this article in mid-September and take a look up almost any pathway in the Mills Garden, there is considerable color of two varieties of climbers that bloom all season, specifically Clair Matin with its medium pink blooms and the New Dawn climber with its light pink blooms. New Dawn also has continuous blooms all season.

There are several other climbers that bloom occasionally all season. Along with William Baffin, other varieties you may want to consider include Altissimo, Blaze and Improved Blaze, Dortmund (with bonus of large orange hips in the fall), Salita, Dublin Bay, Eden, Fourth of July, Pretty in Pink Eden, Henry Kelsey, and Lavender Lassie.

Good luck and enjoy your roses!

*Above right: Dortmund
All photos by Mary Frances Piraino*

