

## Buy It Naked!

- Jolene Adams

Many bare-root roses are available now through February in retail nurseries, by mail-order catalogs and on-line. Venturing out on a cold, drizzly winter day to set out bare-root plants is worth the effort. The advantages of buying bare-root roses more than make up for the discomfort of wintertime planting. Bare-root plants will typically cost 40 to 70% less than the same plants purchased in containers a few months from now.

Some rarer varieties of roses are only available bare-root from catalogs. In addition to price, selection, and availability, bareroot plants tend to establish more quickly than container plants. This is partly due to the plant's roots growing in just one kind of soil. The soil in containers is always a different texture than garden soil. The presence of two different soil types makes it difficult for water to uniformly penetrate the root zone. In fact, some rose growers say bare root planting produces better roses and you should go to the trouble of removing soil from container grown stock if you are planting it in the ground.

When buying from a local nursery, select bare-root shrubs with strong canes; avoid any that have already leafed out. Look at the roots, select those with healthy-looking, well-formed root systems. Avoid any with slimy roots or dry, withered ones. Often the roots are packed in wood shavings and wrapped in plastic so you can't see the roots; avoid packages that have been opened, are waterlogged or seem excessively dry. If ordering plants by mail, check the order as soon as it arrives for errors in packing as well as broken, or damaged plants. Notify the shipper immediately of any problems. Most do a great job of customer service.

It's best to plant as soon as possible after purchase. If you're not ready or the weather is truly ghastly, place the plants in buckets of water - as full as you can get it. They will "keep" in the water until you can get out and dig that hole! Never let the roots dry out or freeze.

Most growers provide detailed planting instructions; read through them before you start. I like to start by digging a hole a bit wider and deeper than the roots. This gives me a chance to check soil conditions. It should be moist but not excessively wet. (*Don't dig in wet clay-if it won't come off the shovel it's too wet.*) If it's very wet wait a few days. Where drainage is a problem, it may be necessary to create a planting area above grade. Use a spading fork to rough up the sides of the hole, as roots have a hard time growing into the surrounding soil if the sides are too smooth.

Remove the packing material from around the roots. Even if it is in a biodegradable bag take the box off. Don't put the wood shaving or moss in the planting hole - put it in the compost. Wash off any remaining bits with a hose, or you can soak the roots in a bucket of water as you dig the hole. It's important that the roots never dry out. Just before planting cut off any damaged or broken roots to sound wood with a clean cut. Remove any major roots that cross over the root system close to the trunk; these could eventually girdle the rose, killing it. Make a cone shaped mound in the center of the planting hole. Position the plant so that it's at the correct depth, usually the same depth it was planted at in the nursery, if this is a grafted rose the graft union should be at least an inch above ground. Spread the roots as evenly as possible over the cone. Back fill, using the native soil from the hole. Don't put chemical fertilizer or fresh manure in the planting hole as it could damage the roots. Composted materials are fine mixed with the native

soil. Hold the plant upright as you firm the soil, being sure there are no air pockets around the roots. Slowly soak with water and firm the soil again.

*An Award of Merit article*