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THE PREPARATION OF ROSE BEDS

By C. C. HILLARY

ROSES equal to the world’s best can be produced almost anywhere in the south-western part of Western Australia with little more attention than is bestowed on most other flowers. It is essential, however, that suitable soil conditions should be provided for the plants.

While there are a few loams here and there in the State rich enough to grow good roses with only limited preparation, most soils will require cultivation to a depth of at least 18 inches and the incorporation of sufficient manures, both natural and artificial, to ensure an adequate supply of plant food. In the case of rose beds situated in sandy ground, some strengthening of the soil with a proportion of loam will be necessary. Heavy soils, in all probability, will also need draining.

When possible, rose beds should be completed a month or two before they are required for planting. Early preparation allows ample time for the proper settlement of the soil and the elimination of air pockets. It also ensures that the manures, added to increase fertility, will be nicely mellowed before the young plants commence making their new roots. As most roses in this State are planted in July, the beds should, if possible, be completed during the first half of May.

SHOW GIRL: A new hybrid tea which seems destined to become very popular in the near future. Well-prepared rose-beds are necessary to produce blooms of this quality.

SPACING

When determining the size of the beds to be constructed, sufficient space should be allowed to permit the full development of the plants. A single row of hybrid-tea bush roses requires a bed 4 ft. wide. A double row, planted in staggered formation, can usually be comfortably accommodated in a bed 7 ft. wide. When determining the length of the bed, provision should be made which will allow at least 3 ft. between the plants. Vigorous-growing roses, such as Signora P. Puricelli, Charles Mallerin and McGredy’s Yellow, grow into each other even when planted 4 ft. apart.

DRAINAGE

If the rose bed is to be constructed in loam, heavy soil, or in a low-lying
Diagram showing method of preparing a bed.

A

Topsoil Removed

4 ft.

Subsoil worked spade depth with Compost
& Potato manure incorporated.

B

Animal manure to be dug in with half
Topsoil.

Subsoil, Compost & Potato manure.

C

All Topsoil returned with two layers of
Animal manure incorporated.

Subsoil, Compost & Potato manure.

Fig. 1.
situation, the first thing to determine is whether the site needs draining. This can be done by sinking several holes a foot square and two feet deep in various parts of the garden, and filling them with water. If the water has drained away within 24 hours, nothing further need be done; but if water remains in the holes at the end of that time, some form of artificial drainage must be provided.

The best way to drain any land is with the aid of 3-in. or 4-in. agricultural drain pipes. These should be placed end to end, not less than two feet below the surface, and laid with a slight fall leading towards a lower part of the garden. If the garden is perfectly level, then the drain should be laid with a slight fall and led to a sump where the water can be collected for baling or pumping out.

**SOIL PREPARATION**

When preparing a rose bed in any kind of soil, the cultivation should be not less than 18 inches deep. This depth is necessary to provide adequate feeding space for the roots. It is also a well-known fact that roses grown in deeply-cultivated soil live longer and flower more profusely than those planted in shallow ground.

One method of preparing a bed which has given excellent results in heavy soil or loam, is as follows:—

Dig out the top soil to a depth of nine inches and throw to one or both sides of the bed. Work the subsoil over well to the full depth of the fork. (See Fig. 1. A.) During this operation, work a quantity of vegetable matter or leafy compost, plus a dressing of bone dust or potato manure (E) through the subsoil. Then return about half of the surface soil to the bed and over this spread a three-inch layer of animal manure: (See Fig. 1 B.) dig the manure into the soil. Shovel in the balance of the top soil and fork another layer of animal manure into the top. (See Fig. 1. C.) The bed should then be heavily watered to hasten the settlement of the soil.

Another way to prepare a bed which never fails to give results is known as the strip method. Mark the bed off into strips about two feet wide and dig out the top soil from the strip at one end to the depth of a spade and place to one side. (See Fig. 2. A.) Throw in bone dust or potato fertiliser (E) at the rate of a liberal handful to the square yard plus a two-inch dressing of well-rotted compost, and fork as evenly as possible through the subsoil to a depth of nine or ten inches.

Dig the top soil from the second strip and throw on the subsoil of the first strip. (See Fig. 2. B.) Then treat the subsoil of the second strip in similar fashion to that described for the first and cover with the top soil from the third strip. (See Fig. 2. C.)

Continue this process until the end of the bed is reached. The top soil removed from the first strip should then be wheeled around and used to cover the subsoil of the last strip, as shown in Fig. 2. D.

The next step is to spread a two or three-inch layer of old animal manure over the bed and fork it evenly and thoroughly through the top soil. A heavy watering should then be given to help settle the soil.

To be successful with roses in the sandy soils of the metropolitan area and elsewhere, it is essential that a proportion of loam and generous quantities of animal manure should be incorporated with the soil when the beds are being prepared. Any good surface loam can be used for the purpose, and it should be mixed with the sand at the rate of not less than one part of loam to two parts of sand. If plenty of loam is available, a 50-50 mixture would be better.

It is unwise, however to make a rose bed entirely of heavy loam in a sandy soil area. A bed composed of loam only tends to set into a compact mass and dry out, and when this happens, water which is applied to keep the bed moist fails to do so. Instead of soaking through the loam, it takes the line of least resistance around the sides of the bed and escapes into the sand below.
The strip method of preparing a rose-bed, shown in diagramatic form.
When preparing a bed in sandy ground, remove the sand to a depth of two feet. Dispense with the bottom layer and keep only the top sand for mixing with the loam. In the bottom of the bed place a layer of loam, treading it down until it forms an artificial subsoil about six inches thick. This subsoil will provide a cool resting place for the anchor roots and help prevent the escape of moisture and plant food into the sand below.

On top of the artificial subsoil, scatter a dressing of bonedust, and then throw in a quantity of garden refuse, such as grass clippings, decayed leaves, weeds, etc. A quantity of the loam and sand mixture, sufficient for a layer about nine inches thick, should then be prepared and thrown into the bed. On top of this should be placed a three or four-inch layer of animal manure for forking into the soil mixture immediately below. The addition of a further nine-inch layer of the sand and loam mixture and another layer of manure forked evenly through the top will complete the bed.

Lawn clippings are of considerable value and, when available, liberal quantities may be incorporated with the soil in rose beds with advantage.

The use of lime is usually unnecessary, since roses thrive best in soils which are slightly acid. In my own rose garden, where the pH of the soil ranges from 6 to 6.5, lime has never been used and all of the bushes maintain a very vigorous growth.

After the beds are finished and before the roses are planted, several light diggings will keep down weeds, improve the aeration, and produce a good, friable tilth in the upper layer of soil.

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