

KENT'S COLUMN – April 2008 Rosebuds:

There are three or four inches of snow on the ground today and it's still coming! But believe me, that snow will melt, the sun will come, temperatures will rise, and roses will bloom! In fact, if you were to go outside today and wade around in the snow inspecting your rose beds you will find some of your bushes, if not all, will be showing tiny new leaves and obvious buds up and down their stalks. It is time to turn your mind to your spring chores.

FEEDING - Roses that have been asleep all winter need a "wake-up call." They will be hungry and will want food at a certain point when the air and ground temperature is right for them. You will see the canes turning green and showing buds and leaves. The point here is that you can feed even now when it is still cold and the roses will not use the food until they are ready and are triggered by temperatures, etc.

There are numerous formulae in the journals and newsletters about just WHAT to feed at certain times during the growing season and especially that first one. Here is what I have developed over the years:

2 parts - 10-10-10 garden fertilizer as the basis
1 part - 30-0-0 nitrogen - bush and root growth
1 part - pelletized gypsum - soften the clay
1/2 part - magnesium
1/2 part - pelletized lime
1/2 part - alfalfa meal or pellets

A "part" can be anything from a cup to a shovel full. I mix mine in a wheel-burrow and apply two cups of the mix around each plant at the drip line, one for minis, and scratch into the ground. After the feeding, water the beds thoroughly.

About a week or two later, I come back with two cups, one for minis, of Mill's Magic Mix. This wonderful fertilizer contains every micro-nutrient the plant requires. I alternate this again during the summer with Monty's liquid plant food, Mirical-Gro, etc.

If you tested your pH and it is lower than 6.5, you need to add one full part lime to the above mix. It is unlikely you will need to do this if you used some lime at the time your beds were constructed. However, I like to use a small amount of lime as mentioned above. My dad always said that lime doesn't mean much to the plant itself, but it stimulates all the other nutrients to do their jobs!

SPRAYING - Some of the bugs we must fight come quite early, and spores of harmful fungi actually over-winter in our rose beds just waiting for new green growth to appear. As soon as the bushes show the new growth you should begin your spraying regime.

For protection from fungus attacks such as blackspot, I use BANNER and alternate with FUNG-INOIL by Bonide, a substitute for MANCOZEB. In other words, I spray with a systemic single-site fungicide one week, and a week or ten days later with a protectant, multi-cite mix. While the plants are showing a lot of energy and growing fast, cut the suggested dosage by at least half the first couple of times you spray, and spray more often than the usual suggested two week intervals. One other note... Only spray in mild weather, at least 50 to 60 degrees, and only in the mild, sunny part of the day for this early spraying.

Aphids will be the first bug you see. They will come hard and fast. MALATHION will rid your plants of them, and as with the fungicide, begin with a mild dose and gradually increase to full strength. The bugs you won't see are our seemingly always present spider mites. However

their work is quickly visible in your sunroom, or other areas where your potted roses are stored. Leaves turn brown and fall off, other leaves droop while still green and appear to be “sick.” Under the leaves the green is replaced with a sooty, spotted, “ashy” looking texture, and that, dear reader, is the work of spider mites. Who knows where they come from and enter so easily into the sunrooms and greenhouses, but they are there! Insecticidal Soap sprayed ever so lightly on the bottom of the leaves will do the trick, but it must be done at least three times about three or four days apart. There are several miticides on the market but they are very expensive. I have tried NEEM products but only managed to damage or kill the young plant. Remember, a regular insecticide will not kill mites. They are spiders, not insects.

NEXT ISSUE will include discussion of the third great spring chore, PRUNING. This is timed to affect our bushes for the spring show, and should not begin before April 12 - 15th.