

ASK THE MASTER GARDENER – Black spots on roses

Is there anything I can do about the black spot that affects my roses every summer?

During this wet summer your plants may have suffered heavily from this fungus, scientifically known as *diplocarpon rosae*.

Uncontrolled, black spot can completely defoliate a rose, leaving nothing behind but canes. However, no matter what the extent of the current damage, there are steps you can take this fall to help improve the health of your plants next spring.

The black spot fungus easily survives winter in infected leaves, so it is important that they be removed both from the ground and the plant. The rose canes as well can harbour the disease over winter. So wait until the rose starts to go dormant and then prune the canes back to about 18 inches.

Good air circulation is a key factor in discouraging black spot, so be sure to eliminate any crowded and crossed canes. And surrounding plants should be kept away from the base of the rose as the disease usually begins at the bottom of the plant where conditions are most humid and dark. Apply a heavy winter compost both to protect and feed your roses.

The likelihood of the fungus recurring next year is high, especially if it was widespread this year, so it's crucial that you begin treatment in the spring before you see it recurring.

When you remove your winter mulch around the roses in the spring, before they leaf, use dormant oil and lime-sulphur spray. Then spray weekly, alternating between lime-sulphur (without the dormant oil) and baking soda week by week (two teaspoons of baking soda to one gallon of water).

If your roses have been badly affected this summer, you can start using this spray method now and continue until the plants begin to go dormant.