



Petaling the House

The Art of Growing Roses

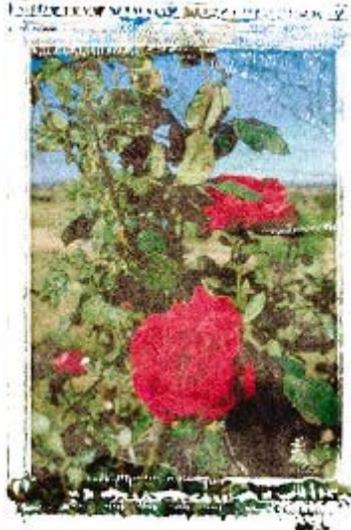
By Verna Gates



You can't help but admire a 95-year-old man with a five-year garden plan, especially when he happens to be your grandfather. He and I cared for his more than 100 rose bushes, instilling my love of gardening with this fairest of flowers.

"Some curse roses for their thorns; I praise them for their beauty," my grandfather, Carl Gates, often said. He was well acknowledged as one of the finest rose growers in the country, with rose growers begging him to test their new varieties. Those in the know secretly drove down the alley way in Birmingham, Ala., to see his garden; others boldly wrangled invitations through the front door.

His roses grew in the open air and open sun of a backyard with plenty of morning light and at least six to eight hours per day. With fragile leaves susceptible to disease, the morning sun helped to dry the dew before black spot could set in. We built raised beds with plenty of organic matter and surrounded them with corrugated steel to better hold water. My granddad insisted on an inch of water – minimum – per week for his prized roses.



"There's more to watering than walking by them with a hose," he often said, spending hours filling the beds with the requisite inch of water. Deep watering helps form a deep root system. Be sure to water the roots and not the leaves, especially late in the day.

When spring begins to rain its way into April, plant your roses in a composition of three-quarters native soil mixed with manure that's "good and rotten." Dig your hole deep enough for the roots to spread, and don't be shy about pruning damaged roots. The graft union should stay above the soil level. Water and prune everything back to 6 to 8 inches above the graft. Do not fertilize until after the first bloom, or you could damage the roots. Then, feed it after every bloom cycle. When winter comes, cut the canes back to 3 feet.



- Fresh
- Dried
- Artificial



From spring through late fall, you will be rewarded with beautiful blooms. Just remember to cut them about a quarter of an inch above three, five or seven leaves at an angle. And be sure to always have a five-year plan, because no matter your age, it keeps you young.



Rose Beads

The Victorians indulged in a total passion for flowers. A bouquet of roses for a young lady brought beauty long after the blooms faded. They preserved the enchanting petals by transforming them into sweetly aromatic jewels. They made rose beads and strung them with pearls and glass beads for elegant neck attire.

You'll need:

- 4 cups fresh rose petals
- 1/2 cup water
- Blender
- Iron skillet
- Straight pins
- Baby or cooking oil
- Cardboard
- Thread or stringing wire

Here is the recipe:

Enjoy your roses through full bloom. Pick the petals before they wilt. Shake the petals gently to let any lady bugs fly away home. Eight to 12 blooms will make 4 cups of rose petals. (Use as many cups of petals as possible to make more beads. Just add a tablespoon of water for every cup of petals.)

Put your rose petals in the sink, and spray them gently with water to clean them. Shake off excess water.

Place 2 inches of petals in the bottom of a blender. Pour in 1/4 cup of water, more if your blender has trouble chopping. Blend well. Stop the blender and add another cup of petals and a tablespoon of water. Blend. Repeat until all the petals are thoroughly blended. It should take 1/2 cup of water for 4 cups of petals. If your blender has trouble blending, add extra water by the tablespoon. The less water, the better.

Try adding one color of flower at a time and watch the mixture change colors. In the end, it will probably be a pinkish color the texture of corn meal. It may be a little watery.

Spread the petal mixture into an iron skillet. Watch for a chemical reaction as the iron turns the mixture black. A new skillet will turn the mixture black quickly; older ones take longer. Store in a cool, dry place, out of sunlight.

For three days, refine the mixture. Pour it into the blender and mix for about three minutes. If necessary to blend, add a tablespoon of water, but try to avoid adding more water. Pour back into the skillet.

For the next seven days, the mixture needs to dry and thicken. Do not let mold form on your petal mixture – stir twice a day at least.



Starting on the seventh day, test for thickness. Take a palm-sized amount, and try to roll it into a ball. When the ball holds firm, you are ready to make beads. Your dough should be a rich black.

Soak straight pins in baby or cooking oil. Set out a cardboard "pincushion" to hold your beads. Use the rest of the cardboard for a rolling mat. The black dough will come off on your hands and clothes! So be careful.

Now create! Roll round beads or oblongs. Form squares or triangles, or make figures. Remember, as your beads dry, they will shrink to about half their original size.

Take greased pins and press them through your beads where you want the stringing holes to go. Stick the loaded pins into the cardboard. Let the beads dry for three to five days. The pins should slip off easily. String with thread or stringing wire.

Mix your black rose beads with colorful beads or pearls. Use gold or silver caps for elegance. The rose scent will stay for about five years. A drop of rose oil will bring that lovely aroma right back.

For more information, read [A Year in the Life of a Rose: A Guide to Growing Roses From Coast to Coast](#) (Harmony Books, 1996) by Rayford Clayton Reddell, one of the best books available on how to grow and tend roses every month of the year.

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[Back to the index](#)



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