



Department of  
Primary Industries and  
Regional Development

## Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 3

---

Volume 1  
Number 4 *July-August, 1952*

Article 20

---

7-1952

### The winter pruning of roses

C C. Hillary  
*Department of Agriculture*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://library.dpird.wa.gov.au/journal\\_agriculture3](https://library.dpird.wa.gov.au/journal_agriculture3)

 Part of the [Horticulture Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Hillary, C C. (1952) "The winter pruning of roses," *Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 3*: Vol. 1: No. 4, Article 20.  
Available at: [https://library.dpird.wa.gov.au/journal\\_agriculture3/vol1/iss4/20](https://library.dpird.wa.gov.au/journal_agriculture3/vol1/iss4/20)

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the Agriculture at Digital Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 3 by an authorized administrator of Digital Library. For more information, please contact [library@dpird.wa.gov.au](mailto:library@dpird.wa.gov.au).



A row of the variety Signora P. Puricelli growing in the author's garden. These plants are two years old and average seven feet in height.

## THE WINTER PRUNING OF ROSES

C. C. HILLARY

**N**EXT to picking armfuls of blooms, I doubt whether any phase of rose growing gives the gardener greater pleasure than pruning. To cut off a misplaced branch, or to relieve the plant of worn-out wood which has already produced its share of flowers; to snip away the spindly growths and twiggy bits which overcrowd the centre of the bush; to stand off and visualise just how lovely the plant will look when covered with flowers in three months' time, only to return again and cut off an inward-growing shoot which threatens to upset the symmetry of the bush; all this is work which can give keen pleasure to the enthusiast.

There is nothing difficult about pruning roses, and the work can, and should, be done by every grower of the Queen of Flowers. Those who always leave the work to others are never likely to acquire a proper knowledge of the art. Even if you do make a few mistakes at the outset, it will matter little; no rose bush was ever killed by pruning alone, and you will still have roses.

At the outset, however, I should like to correct the mistaken impression held by some that pruning makes roses grow. It does nothing of the kind.

Food and water, and plenty of both are what makes roses grow. What pruning does do is to assist the plant to use its sap-flow to the best advantage, and by doing so enable it to produce a regular supply of good blooms throughout the season.

Hard, or severe pruning, as was customary in most rose-growing countries until a few years ago, is no longer practised. Experience with modern roses has shown that, except where the winters are particularly severe, moderate pruning only is necessary for the production

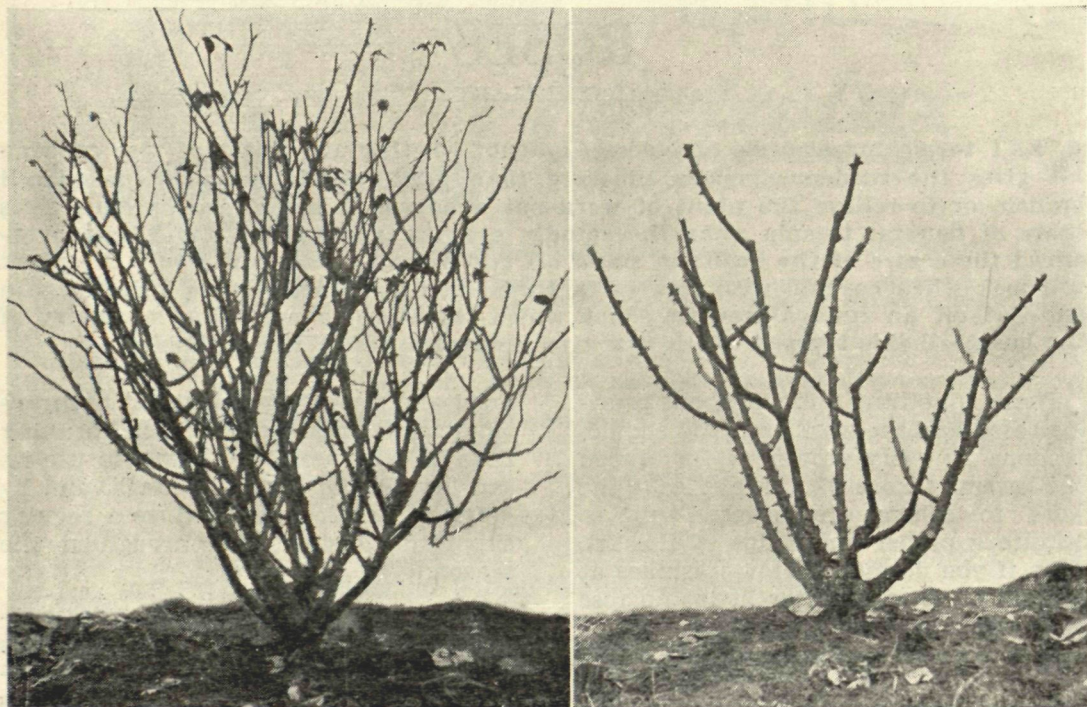


of good garden roses as well as exhibition blooms. Big bushes produce more and bigger flowers and big bushes should be the aim in every garden.

To obtain the best results from pruning, you must give your imagination full play and aim to build up the plants as you would have them when in full growth. Every time a branch is shortened, the eye should follow, in fancy, the progress of the shoot which will subsequently make its appearance. Only by adopting this practice will you become expert enough to build up a symmetrical plant which will be neither overcrowded with growth nor sparse with its blooms. Once the principles of pruning are understood, common sense is the quality most desired: the other requirements are a pair of sharp secateurs, a thin pruning saw, a sharp knife for paring the saw cuts, and a pair of stout leather gloves—if you value your hands.

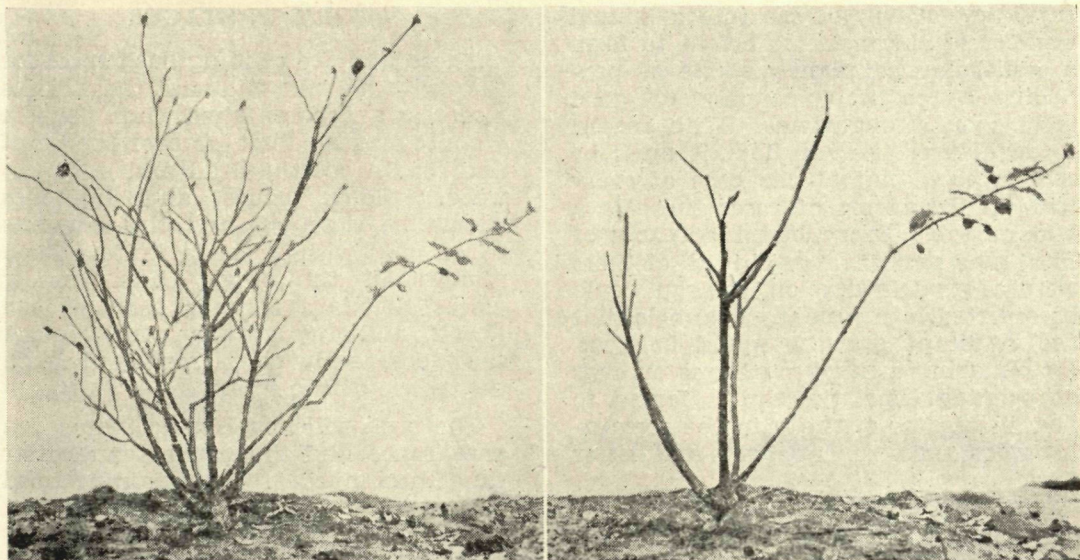
## TIME OF PRUNING

Pruning can be carried out at any time when the plants are dormant, but no advantage is gained by doing the work too early in the winter. Every district has its most suitable time, but even this will vary from year to year according to the kind of weather experienced in the autumn and early winter. Generally, however, the second half of July will be found the most suitable time for pruning in the suburbs of Perth. North of Perth a couple of weeks earlier would probably produce the desired results, while in the lower south-western areas it would be better to delay the work until the first week in August. Apart from fixing dates or times, however, the plants themselves indicate in no uncertain fashion when the work should be done. As soon as the lower, dormant buds commence to swell, it is a certain sign that the sap-flow is on the move again,



**Fig. 1. PRUNING A TWO-YEAR-OLD ROSE-BUSH**—This is a bush of the popular McGredy's Yellow, before and after pruning. Note that all the criss-crossing and spindly growth has been removed leaving only growths as thick as, or thicker than, a lead pencil.





**Fig. 2. PRUNING A ONE-YEAR-OLD BUSH**—A bush of Madame A. Meilland, perhaps better known as Peace. This bush carried an unopened bud which was left to flower. This stem (on right) will be cut back half-way to ground level as soon as the flower opens.

and the pruning should then be completed without further delay.

The reason why early pruning is unwise is that it stimulates the lower, dormant buds into action before the sap-flow is sufficient to nourish the shoots produced and carry them to maturity. The result is that after making a few inches of growth they languish and frequently die.

### AN IMPORTANT POINT

The pruning of hybrid tea roses differs entirely from the pruning required by deciduous fruit trees. While a fruit tree, such as a peach or a plum, makes a permanent framework which usually lasts the life of the tree, the rose is continually renewing its framework by throwing up new shoots from the base of the plant. It is important that this difference should be understood, because it is on the different habit of growth that the system of pruning is based.

The new shoots sent up each year from the base of the rose are known as basal-shoots or water-shoots. As they

grow, they tap and divert to themselves the sap which was nourishing the former main canes, thus causing the latter to lose vigour. The new shoots, after serving a useful life for a season or two, in turn also get "tapped" and starved by succeeding growths—a process which continues indefinitely throughout the life of the plant. This change takes place every year, and to prevent the bush from becoming cluttered up with useless branches, the impoverished and worn-out wood must be removed each year during the winter pruning.

Anyone can soon learn to tell the difference between impoverished leaders and healthy canes if they will spend a little time carefully observing the plants. The former usually have bark of a yellowish-green appearance with a surface which is rough and sometimes mottled. Healthy wood always has clean-looking bark of a clear green, or brownish-green colour.

It should be evident from the habit of growth outlined above, therefore, that the object of pruning is to gradually replace the worn-out wood, and to

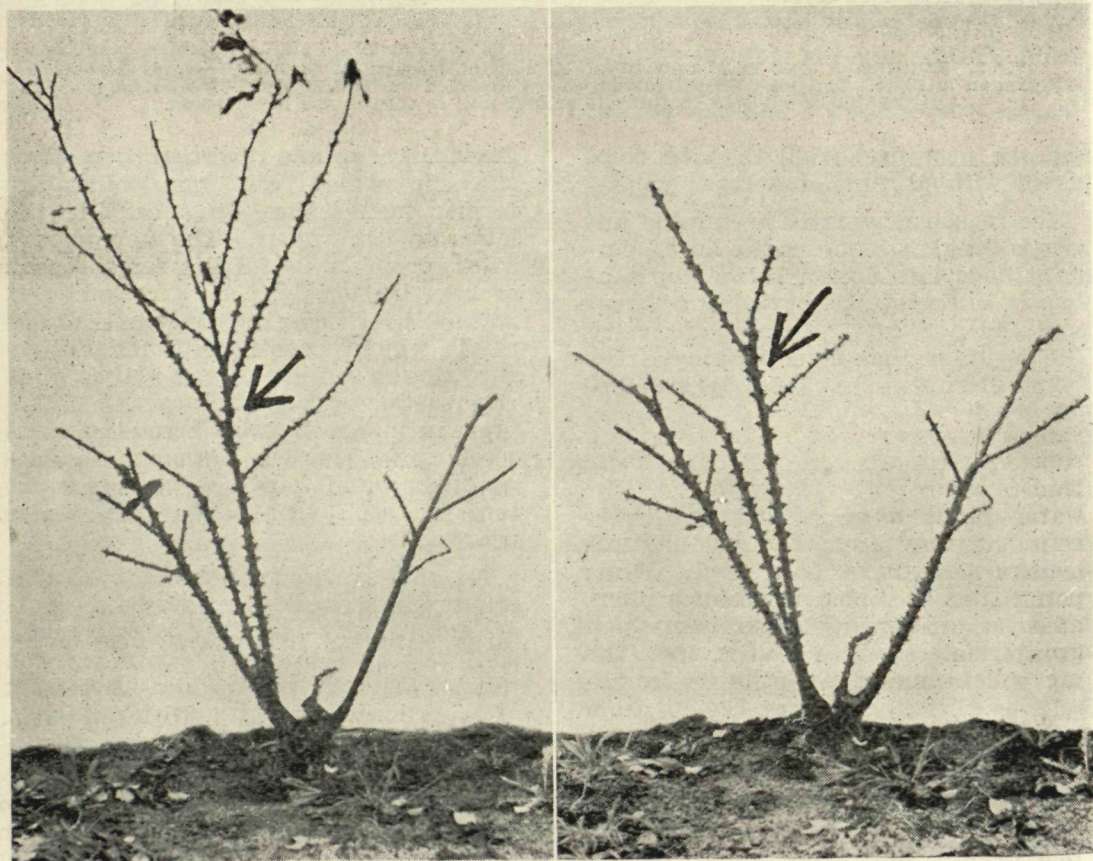


regulate the flow of sap into a limited number of channels—sufficient to form a well-balanced plant capable of producing a reasonable supply of good blooms on strong stems. With regard to regulating the sap-flow, it must be remembered that at the base of every leaf on the stems of roses there is a bud or eye. Every bud is capable of forming a new shoot and, if all of them were allowed to develop, the sap would be diverted into so many channels that the resultant growths would be poor. By removing a number of eyes or buds at pruning time, the sap is forced to flow in greater quantity in the remaining wood and stronger shoots and better flowers result.

## WORK IN STAGES

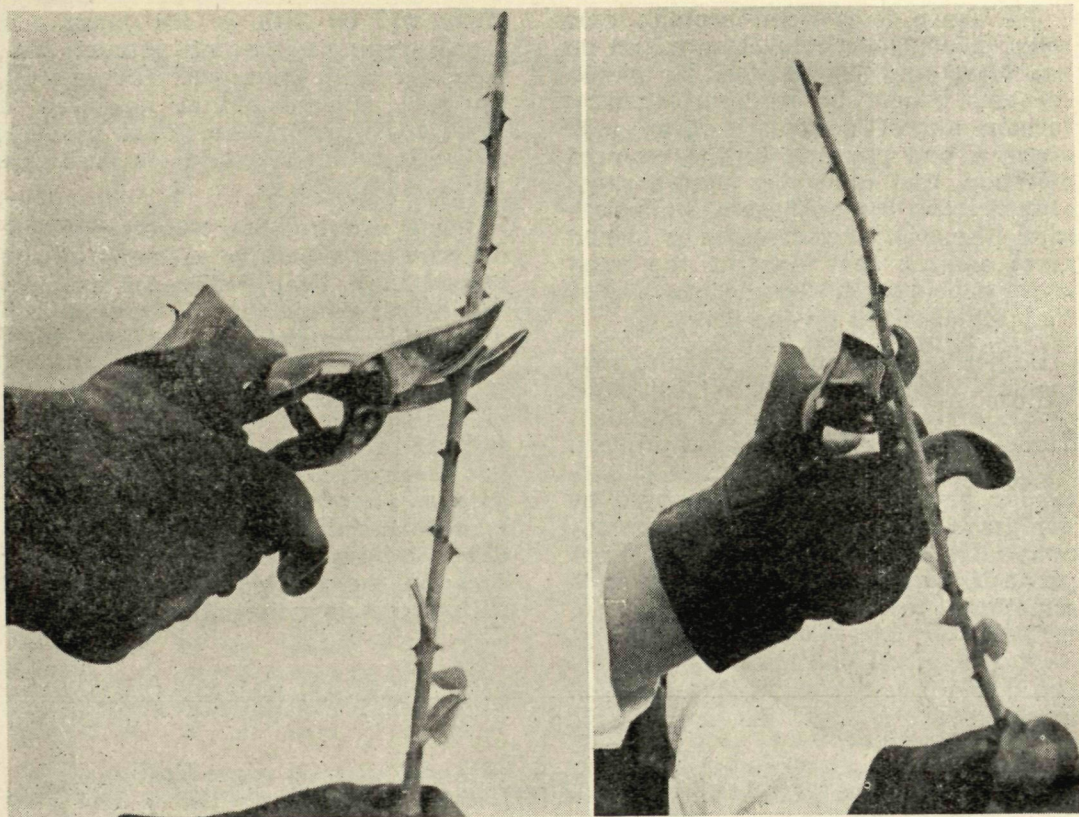
Those who are pruning bush roses for the first time will find that the work is more easily accomplished when done in definite stages. First, go over the plant and remove all the dead and worn-out wood. Thick canes and branches should be sawn off and the saw-cuts pared over with a sharp knife. Then remove all the twiggy bits, spindly pieces that are thinner than a lead pencil, and any growth which might cause damage by criss-crossing through the centre of the plant.

The bush will now have a more open appearance and the pruner can better gauge how much of the remaining wood



**Fig. 3. TREATMENT OF A WATER SHOOT**—The tall centre growth, indicated by the arrow, is a water-shoot on the variety Charles Gregory. On the right, it is shown after pruning. The top centre has been removed and the three laterals shortened back.





**Fig. 4. CORRECT USE OF SECATEURS**—At left a slanting cut is shown being made about a quarter of an inch above the bud or eye. At right the secateurs are held to show how the heel or hook (not the blade) presses against the part of the branch which is being removed.

should be removed. The next step is to shorten back all the upright-growing leaders, with the exception of the water-shoots produced during the recent summer and autumn. If the leaders are cut back to a plump bud pointing in the required direction, situated just above the highest, strongest-growing lateral or side shoot, the pruning will be hard enough.

Water-shoots should be removed only when they are badly placed on the plant. Those that are left should not be shortened below the topmost branch and, if no branch has formed, the top few inches only should be snipped away. In the second year, the water-shoots will have produced branches lower down. They are then regarded

and treated as leaders, being shortened to a plump bud situated just above the highest, vigorous lateral or branch. A vigorous branch is one with wood thicker than a lead pencil.

The final stage is the shortening of the laterals or side branches which grow outwards from the leaders or upright canes. All of the laterals should be cut back to within one, two, three, or four buds of the point where they spring from the leaders, according to the strength of the shoot. Stout laterals may carry three or four buds or eyes: weak laterals never more than one. If there are so many laterals that they are likely to overcrowd the bush, a proportion should be removed entirely.




Use sharp tools when pruning your roses, make your cuts cleanly and do not leave any jagged ends or pieces. All cuts should be made in slanting fashion almost a quarter of an inch above a bud pointing in the required direction, and remember that a shoot always grows the way the bud is pointing. The heel of the secateurs should press against that part of the wood which is being removed and not against that which is left on the plant.

Do not be frightened to cut into your plants—you are not likely to harm them much, even if you do make mistakes. Timid people rarely make good pruners. But if in doubt as to whether a particular branch should be removed or not, leave it on: it can always be cut away later if thought desirable. Do not prune the weak growers severely as is sometimes recommended. If you do,

there will be little of the plant left. Light pruning is the only pruning suitable for such varieties. In general, however, remember that no piece of wood any thinner than a lead pencil is of much use to a hybrid tea bush rose for any purpose.

When pruning has been completed, all prunings should be gathered up and placed in a heap ready for burning. The plants should then be sprayed with a suitable fungicide to protect them from disease. Mr. W. P. Cass Smith, Government Plant Pathologist, recommends the use of winter-strength lime sulphur in those gardens where mildew has been the principal disease. In gardens where the plants have suffered from both mildew and black spot, Bordeaux mixture should be used. Any scale on the plants can be eradicated with white spraying oil.



## The "HAYTER" Rotary Mower

is the implement you require to renovate your pastures — the **ONLY** Machine which will **SATISFACTORILY DEAL** with Bracken — Tussocks — Kikuya grass, Guildford grass, etc., as well as being a first class general mower; quickly attached to your tractor and cuts a 6ft. swathe at fast speed, or a hand model with its own engine, cutting 2ft. and both equally effective.

List of users supplied on application. Write or call for literature or inspect the "HAYTER" ROTARY MOWER in our Showrooms.

**WESTERN MOTOR COMPANY LTD**  
**772 Wellington St, Perth - B 2451-2**