

Shearing for Better Roses

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Some 15 years ago, England's Royal National Rose Society conducted extensive tests on three methods of pruning roses. Surprisingly, "rough" pruning (cutting all shoots straight across at the same height with pruning shears or hedge trimmer) resulted in more and stronger growth and equal or better flowering than the traditional careful and time-consuming cane-by-cane pruning of hybrid teas and floribundas.

Shearing has been adopted by many rosarians here as a great time-saver. In American Rose (American Rose Society, Box 30,000, Shreveport, LA 71130), California gardener Steve Steps calls it "Pruning at 5 RPM (Roses per minute)" and uses it to trim a large public rose garden. He reports great success, and provides some important tips:

A gasoline-powered trimmer which has a 1" cutting gap is best; many have a ½" gap and tend to chew through a branch instead of cutting it clean... upward cuts sever cleanly, while downward cuts can cause splitting and tearing of the canes... cut sides of a bush first, then cut across the top, so that the cuttings will fall to the ground rather than get caught in the side branches.

Mr. Steps agrees with the British researchers, who noted that roses pruned by this method can become overcrowded in the center and thus more prone to disease because of lack of air circulation through the bush. Occasional "classical" pruning is probably wise to keep the bush center more open.