

Equipment Care

by Steven Grass- Consulting Rosarian – Charleston, WV.

IT'S MARCH...do you know where your pruners are? How about your sprayer? And what condition did you leave them in at the end of the rose season? When the final pruning was done and the dormant oil sprayed, did you clean your pruners and sprayer? Or did you put them in the spray shed or some other dark place with every intention of doing so, but didn't? Now is an excellent time to get them out and give them a good going over before you actually need to use them.

Pruners--Take your pruners completely apart and clean the blade and other metal parts with coarse steel wool (an SOS pad works well also). I also used a steel brush (similar in size to a toothbrush) a few weeks ago on a pair of pruners to clean rust from the handles, and it did an excellent job. To sharpen the blade, use a fine metal file or diamond hone at the top of the blade along its length, and then turn the blade over and make a few light passes on the back to remove any burrs. Reassemble, and put a light coat of oil over the metal surfaces. Do your blades actually meet for a proper cutting surface? You might need to replace them if they have been worn away from years of sharpening. A crisp cut is important to prevent damage to the canes. Your local garden centers most likely have a good selection of replacement parts for Felcos; check them out.

Sprayer--Next, get out your sprayer. If you have deposits in the bottom of your tank, mix up enough of a 50/50 vinegar-and-water solution to cover the bottom of the tank, and let it sit overnight. This should remove most, if not all, of the deposits. Rinse the tank well. Take the spray wand apart and lubricate all o-rings and gaskets with petroleum jelly to keep them from drying out and becoming hard and brittle. You can buy a small sample-size tube of petroleum jelly at the drug store for 25¢ to use specifically for this purpose. A Q-tip is useful in applying the petroleum jelly to the gaskets and o-rings. Q-tips are also useful in cleaning the spray tip and other small places that are otherwise difficult to clean. Replace the o-rings and gaskets if necessary, lubricating them as you go.

It's also not a bad time to assess your spray materials, the condition of your spray gloves, and your supply of filters for your spray mask.

Chemicals--A good rule for chemicals is to date the bottle upon opening. Make sure that you dispose of old chemicals properly if you feel that they are no longer viable. To prevent carry over, I purchase sprays in the smaller sizes, and normally use them within the growing season. This eliminates guessing about their strength. If I had sprays that were over two years old after opening, I would most likely dispose of them. Perform a hard assessment of the chemicals that you used last year. Did they really work in your garden? Are you using something that hasn't performed well simply because it's worked for someone else? Your garden has its

own microclimate; things that are effective elsewhere may just not perform well for you. I have used Immunox the last few years to control blackspot, and it has worked very well for me, but many others have said that it has not been effective for them. Many chemicals are not cheap, and there is always the concern about their effects on the environment. Use the least potent spray to do the job; don't get caught up in "more is better", whether it's strength of the spray or cost of the material. Sometimes very simple (a blast of water or liquid soap) is the best.

Spray Gloves--A good pair of spray gloves will last one season. Hold them up to the light--you might be surprised to see a good number of tiny holes eaten through that aren't otherwise visible. Get a new pair every year.

Filters--Make sure that you have enough filters for the season; they should be changed every two months, or monthly if you spray a large number of roses. It's easy to remember when to next change them by dating the outside of the cartridge when they're replaced.

Fertilizers--Finally, look at your supply of fertilizers and decide what you might need for the growing season.

The roses you ordered will be here sooner than you think, and it'll be time to begin spring chores. Take the time now to make sure that your equipment and supply needs are taken care of, and you'll be ready for the coming growing season

Steven Grass
Charleston (WV) Rose Society