

Roses and Organics

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I have heard it said, even long before I started growing roses, “that if you wanted to grow a beautiful rose, you first had to shovel a lot of manure”. That statement is not at all off track. Roses love organics and seem not to be able to get enough.

Manures are excellent for roses and almost any kind will do. Chicken is one of the best along with horse, cow, etc. You will find dried manures at your garden center which may be applied without worry of burning. One economical source is to visit your local farmer. He is usually glad for you to carry off what you want just for the asking but be careful! The fresh from the farm is much more potent and will burn if applied heavily. Manures do not have much in the way of food value but rather increase the bacteria count in the soil. This bacteria count is needed to break down organic foods that have been applied. It also encourages earthworms and other organisms that help to enrich the soil.

Organic foods (unlike chemical foods) must be broken down into a form the roses can use. This process takes about six weeks. Chemical foods are already in a form the plant can use and go to work instantly.

There are many organic foods on the market for roses which may be purchased from your garden center. Rose Tone® is a very good choice and may be purchased at any garden center. Mills Magic Rose Mix® is excellent and must be ordered from Mills Magic in Tennessee.

There are many components that may be purchased from a farm feed store or garden center. Alfalfa meal, one roses love, is inexpensive and easy to apply. Fish meal may be found at many farm feed stores and contains many nutrients roses need. I once went to a feed store and asked for fish meal. The man looks at me and said “What on earth are you going to do with fish meal?” I replied “I am going to feed my roses”. He laughed and said “That is the way the Indians used to do it”. You see, rosarians aren’t that crazy, it’s just that our friends and neighbors think so until you give them a beautiful bouquet of the end result. The list goes on – bone meal, dried blood, cotton seed meal, milorganite and the list continues.

In addition to feeding these items dry, many of them may be made into a tea and given to your plants as a liquid. For instance, take a 32 gal trash can – fill it with water, add about three cups of alfalfa meal and let it steep for about 4 days. You can then pour about a gallon of the “tea” around each rose bush. The same may be done with some of the other organics if you can stand the aroma. Manures make good teas but your neighbor may not care for the smell when she is having that important garden entertainment.

It may be said that organic feeding is Nature’s way of recycling. Nature takes one thing or the waste from one and transforms it into something plants can use. My father was a farmer. He would always say that you look at manure and comment on how bad it looks and smells. You then take the manure out and put it on the field. It makes the grass grow; you cut the grass and feed it to the cow. You butcher the cow and cook that

steak and say “My, that taste good!”. The same may be said for roses. You put that awful looking, stinking stuff on the rose beds, you cut the roses and bring them in and say “My, what a beautiful rose and what great fragrance!”.