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# Winterizing Tender Roses

How to prepare roses for the New England cold

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Wild roses are equipped to endure the wide temperature swings of their habitat, unfortunately hybrid teas and other tender roses are not. While there are other types of tender roses, this handout mostly pertains to hybrid teas, as well as some grandifloras and floribundas. Hybrid teas, and by extension grandifloras and floribundas, are descended from roses native to moderate regions and regions that do not frost at all. They are not naturally resistant to the cold. Deep freezing can damage and dry out the canes; in many cases they simply turn black and die. The prudent gardener must protect their tender roses if they intend to over winter them.

The time honored method of protecting hybrid tea roses is to pile up dirt or mulch around and over the base of the bush. This process is known as hilling or mounding. It is done just before the ground is likely to freeze. The mound protects the lower portion of the shrub from the winter wind and cold so the rose can regrow in the spring. The amount of protection a tender rose needs depends on the climate. If the ground freezes solid for most of the winter and the temperatures are likely to drop below 10°F (-12°C), your hybrid teas will need to be mounded over; Most of New England will need at least 12 inches of mulch above the crown or bud union. Keep in mind drastic temperature swings can be equally damaging especially without protective snow cover. If one lives in a moderate area with mild winters, such as a coastal zone; protect your hybrid teas with a rose cone, burlap or hay. If very low temperatures are infrequent and heavy rains keep the ground wet, the bushes are left uncovered; Excessive moisture encourages fungal diseases and other ailments.

As with most plants, the best guarantee of a rose bush's survival through the winter is good care during the summer. A vigorous bush will withstand the cold's rigors far more readily than a weakened one. Keeping the rose watered well and disease free will count for a lot.

## Step One

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Prune back the shrub after it has gone dormant, which should be after a couple of hard frosts, but before a deep freeze sets in. Eliminate dead or weak canes completely. The resulting healthy canes should be pruned back by half. The aim is to reduce the overall bulk so that it can be protected efficiently.



## Step Two

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The mounding process is simple and there are many options. Dirt can be used, but it needs to come from elsewhere in the garden and it needs to drain freely. For simplicities sake, using mulch is recommended. A fresh bag will be disease free and drain well. Simply pile the mulch up covering the heart of the plant. Depending on the area, the mound should be between eight and twelve inches tall. If rabbits or deer are a problem, one can cover it with just about anything, even evergreen boughs. Other options are a rose cone that can be filled with mulch/leaves or a simple cage made from wire or burlap to contain the mulch/leaves/dirt.

## Step 3

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In the spring the rose will need to be uncovered. It is very tempting to uncover the rose with the first spring thaw, however one should wait. March in New England can be windy and bitter. If the ground is still frozen and day time temperatures are warm, the rose will desiccate if un-mounded. Wait until the buds start swelling but before the new shoots reach a quarter of an inch. In most areas this tends to coincide with the first color on the forsythias.