

Growing Potted Roses – Mark McGuire

This is an update of Mark's 2013 article published in some regional newsletters.

Please note that this is my preferred method of growing miniature or miniflora roses in pots. As I have had remarkable results over the last 25 years of growing, these methods that I suggest are worth trying.

There is no magic formula, be it soil mixtures, fertilisers or whatever. Rosarians still succumb to the belief that there is ... well I don't know of any!

One should first of all pay particular attention to hygiene and safety. A face covering mask and gloves are essential as potting mixes can be a source of many harmful organisms (e.g. Legionella bacteria). For best results a black plastic container of 400 mm or 16 inches is my preferred size (approximately 30 litres in volume). Yes, you can still use smaller pots, however the results will not be as good. If you were to drive around your suburb on rubbish collection day then maybe you can be lucky enough to acquire them for free. I have accumulated some 100 or more pots over the years this way.

Make sure you thoroughly clean out the pots that you intend to use and that they have **several weep holes** so the water can easily disperse. Otherwise the roots will become water logged and your bare rooted rose will suffer accordingly and perhaps soon die. Another good idea is to use a mesh or pieces of broken tiles or some such matter placed over the weep-holes as this will stop your soil mixture leaching out the bottom.

For the potting mixture, mix together equal proportions of Debco Premium Potting Mix along with a premium garden soil and add a few handfuls of the **Neutrog product Seamungus**. A 30litre bag of premium potting mix costs around \$12 and is marked with the Australian Standard Certification of a red rectangle with 5 ticks. It contains SaturAid wetting agent, controlled release fertilisers, water retaining crystals, and a combination of trace elements and growth stimulants.

Note: Pure garden soil in a pot would soon become too solid and detrimental to your plant's growth. **Seamungus** is a blend of seaweed, fish, humic acid and manure. This is an Australian product and no doubt those living overseas can source a similar product.

Next, place your mixture in the pot leaving about a 100 mm gap between the top of the soil and the rim of the pot. Whether planting a bare rooted rose or repotting one, first check the roots for damage and trim. Fan out the roots and place in the soil, making sure the bud union is slightly above the top of your soil mix. Over time the soil will descend in the pot. With limited pressure make sure the plant is sitting firmly in the centre of the container. Apply a couple of soakings of water and then add about 50mm of cow manure, making sure it is kept well away from the trunk of the rose, and then place as much lucerne hay on top of the cow manure as the pot will allow, without spilling all over your yard.

Cow manure is by far the best to use and readily available whereas **lucerne (alfalfa) hay** is head and shoulders above any other mulch. So yes, during the growing season keep topping up your pots with these two products. Yes, you may

have to pay a little extra with the results being worthwhile. Do not be misled by the nurseries as they tend to steer you onto an alternate product which will be cheaper. No doubt you wish for results that are worthy of all your effort, so this is my recommendation.

By using this method you will induce worms to multiply and greatly benefit your soil mix. Take note there is no soil in potting mixtures and therefore no worms.

To stop your pot from overheating, be sure that your newly potted plant container is not making contact with the concrete or tiles underneath. Raise your pot by using a few small bricks or small terracotta feet that can readily be purchased in the nurseries.

Never place your pot in a saucer type dish that will retain water as this will also eventually lead to root rot. **When do we need to feed?** I suggest a good six months or so after potting/planting. **Very little fertiliser is best.**

If the manufacturers recommend 100 grams then only apply about 20% of that every couple of months. I recommend that you **use a liquid fertilizer rather than pellets or granules**. Whatever you do, be sure to give the pot a good drenching before and a good soaking after fertilising. **Water is still the best fertiliser!**



***Above: Figurine**, grown in the same pots without changing the soil for 22 years.*

Recently on the ABC 702 gardening show a caller rang in with what I believed was this problem. She fertilised and watered regularly over the last few years and now all her leaves were falling off and die back was occurring. Yes, she said the water was running out the pot rather fast. I concluded that her watering was not making contact with the fertilisers she was using and subsequently a build-up of them was happening or perhaps the pots were becoming dry. Due to the fact that the plant could not take up all this accumulated food, she was creating her own problems.

If you wish to grow the bigger Floribunda or Hybrid Tea roses then follow the same procedure as above. You will need to use a rather large pot. For example, a 500 mm (20 inches) diameter pot would be approximately 50 litres in volume and a 560 mm (22 inches) diameter pot (very large) would be approximately 60 litres

Be aware that some roses do not like pots. I have struck this problem on many occasions. Once placed out in the garden they have taken off and become Grand Champions!!

When do we re-pot? Rarely ever have I done so. None of my pots have been re-potted over the past 25 years and yet my results are great, or so I think!



Left: Benardella's Ruby, grown in the same pots without changing the soil for 19 years.

Right: Magic Show, grown in the same pots without changing the soil for 9 years.

It is necessary to water your pots every day and in really hot weather, twice per day. Use a hand held rose wand, ensuring the water spreads all over the top of the pot. This is preferable to a drip type system which tends to make "ant tracks", meaning the water flows down these little tracks without spreading over the whole mix. The nutrients contained in the mix need a good soaking all the time.

Lastly you will need to check the pH of your potted soil every so often or if you suspect the plant is not performing well. The ideal pH for roses is 6.5 – 7 i.e. slightly acidic. This is rather hard to accomplish as I have never been able to achieve a higher reading than 6.3. Below pH 7 the soil is acidic and roses best perform when so. Whilst above pH 7 the mix is considered alkaline.

I have two different manufacturers' pH kits so that I can compare my results. However I must admit they both give identical readings of the same soil. There are some rather inexpensive test kits available and they can last forever. Follow the instructions and if you are having a problem consult the horticulturist at your local nursery.

With winter pruning there is no right or wrong way. Prune high or low as the results will be nearly identical. Low pruning appear to give more water shoots whereas cutting higher tends to produce more flowers. **Keep your bushes clear of deadwood and dieback during the growing season**, whilst you must dead-head regularly (removing spent blooms). They look good on the bush however they are detrimental to the future growth and reproduction of more flowers.

In most cases when seeking advice always approach the top person in that particular field whether it is the exhibitor, judge, breeder, soil environmentalist or whoever. Most are only too willing to offer advice, so do not be afraid to ask. If you

wish to become competitive by exhibiting in Shows then you have to devote much more time to your roses. People such as Roger Federer, or anyone else in their chosen field did not become famous without going on and taking that extra step to achieve their goals. More effort will render better results.

The first one shows two Irresistible miniature roses. Both have been grown from cuttings and one was placed in a 16 inch/400mm pot and the other a smaller 12 inch/300mm pot. Both have been placed next to each other and grown identically. Note the larger pot is more robust, taller with more roses most times. They both grow well. The only benefit is that the smaller potted rose is much easier to handle.

Baby Jack is the miniature rose in the other photo. Planted in this pot last September and now over one and half metres tall with many flowers and buds galore. What I am trying to convey that there is no need to start off in a smaller pot and gradually increase the pot size as the rose grows. That means a lot of extra work.

All roses pictured in this article have been grown and photographed by Mark