Prevent Disease in Your Roses

Spectacular blooms and diverse types and varieties make roses a favorite of many Kentucky gardeners. However, warm, humid growing conditions create an ideal environment for serious problems each year with black spot and powdery mildew.

Gardeners can nip these fungal diseases in the bud by planting resistant or tolerant varieties and creating an unfavorable environment for disease development. It may be necessary to use fungicides throughout the summer, especially on susceptible varieties.

To reduce foliar diseases, try to avoid conditions where rose leaves remain wet for an extended period of time. Do not wet foliage when watering plants and allow sufficient time for leaves to dry before nighttime. Prune shading vegetation from overhanging trees and provide space between rose bushes to improve ventilation and sunlight penetration.

Sanitation also is important for managing rose diseases. If you have not already removed and destroyed old leaves, winter-damaged canes and debris, do it as soon as possible. These items are a source of disease-causing organisms.

Many fungicides are labeled to control rose diseases. Always check the label to be sure the product controls black spot and powdery mildew, and read and follow application instructions. To maintain disease suppression, repeat fungicide applications at 10- to 14-day intervals throughout the growing season.

Black spot produces dark, circular spots with fringed borders on the top or bottom of leaves. Infected leaves often turn yellow and drop, reducing flower numbers and quality. White, powdery fungal growth is a sign of powdery mildew. It is easy to locate on such plant surfaces as leaves, stems and buds. Infected leaves may be small and deformed.

Another summertime disease is rose rosette, which affects roses throughout Kentucky. It is not a fungal disease. This disease is spread by a microscopic mite. The primary host is multiflora rose, a thorny plant native to Asia and introduced into the United States as a conservation plant and “living fence.” The disease also affects cultivated roses. Early symptoms are increased growth of shoots, which appear more succulent than normal and develop excessive thorns, and distorted, dwarfed leaves. The affected shoots are not winter hardy and produce few blooms.

Early disease detection is essential to keep rose rosette from spreading. Remove and destroy any infected roses to keep the disease from healthy plants nearby. Since multiflora roses might be a disease reservoir, remove and destroy any located within one-eighth of a mile from the rose bed.

Sarah Stolz is the Campbell County Horticulture Agent.