

## Deadheading and Disbudding

By Sharon Moore, Past President Desert Rose Society  
& Hal Reynolds, Vice-President Desert Rose Society, ARS Consulting Rosarian

Deadheading and disbudding are terms that sound alike, but are very different. Deadheading is an integral part of regular grooming and maintenance, while disbudding is an optional choice to create a desired result.

### **Deadheading:**

To “deadhead” refers to removing dead or spent blossoms. This practice promotes repeat blooming by directing the plant’s energy into flower production instead of reproduction (seed).

Deadheading also removes hiding places for insects, discourages disease, improves air circulation, and makes way for more sun to reach more deeply into the plant. Regular deadheading throughout the growing season will stimulate faster rebloom, often grow stronger stems, and definitely keep your roses looking more attractive.

To deadhead, cut below the spent blossom, approximately ¼” above an outward facing five-leaflet leaf or swollen bud eye (where the next flower stem will grow) and where the stem is about pencil size or larger for hybrid teas and smaller for smaller flowers. Often the leaf where you have made the cut will turn yellow and fall off – this is normal. When you are removing a spray, cluster, or cluster of blooms, cut below the entire mass.

During the intensely hot summer months in the desert, it is imperative that you leave as much foliage on the bush as possible to avoid sunburn of the canes; some advocate “finger pruning” or removing only the spent flower bloom and no more for this reason. However, during the spring and fall growing season, your cuts can be deeper down the stems. While deadheading, you can adjust the height of various canes by how far down you cut them. You do not necessarily have to cut to the first five leaflet leaf; it can be another lower leaflet, depending upon the desired shape and balance.

### **Disbudding:**

The practice of disbudding applied to roses can produce some impressive results in the size and quality of the bloom. This is how you get those large flowered, long-stemmed roses. When disbudding for one bloom to a stem roses, such as hybrid teas, you remove the side buds that develop at the leaf axels below the main bloom. Do this by rubbing the tiny buds out from of the angle created between the leaf and stem. Try using your thumb. It works

best for getting right in the right place. The earlier you do this in the development of the side buds the better, because you will leave less of a scar or black stub at the site.

### **Disbudding for Exhibiting:**

In a rose show, a single bloom on a stem will be disqualified if it has side buds, with the exception of Old Garden Roses and shrub roses.

When disbudding roses that bloom in clusters like floribundas, first you have determine how many buds there are. If there is a central bud and only one or two side buds, remove the side buds and leave the central bud. When presented with many buds but one central bud, remove the central bud and make the stem into a spray (or cluster), because the central bud will bloom first and fade before the rest of the buds open.

A spray, for show purposes, must contain two or more blossoms, but three or more blossoms are best. Also, select stems with multiple buds that are about the same size so they open at the same time to ensure the desired blossom count.

For disbudding minis and minifloras that are one bloom per stem, follow the directions for disbudding hybrid tea roses. For a spray of blossoms, be it on a hybrid tea, grandiflora, floribunda, mini or miniflora, follow the directions for cluster blooming roses. Polyantha and small flowered cluster blooming roses are usually not disbudded. Disbudding Old Garden Roses varies depending on the type of rose and your preference.