

Earth-Kind® Roses Demonstration Garden By Linda Langelo, Horticulture Program Associate

Texas AgriLife Extension Service designates select rose cultivars as Earth-Kind® Roses through the Earth-Kind® Landscape Program. Any rose cultivar that gains this designated title has been through eight years of research and field trial data. A seven-member team of doctorate individuals include horticulturists, plant pathologists, soil scientist and an entomologist select the roses. No pesticides, chemical or organic materials are ever applied to the roses during the trial and research period of eight years. The idea is to have landscape roses which are low-maintenance, remain beautiful throughout the season and the homeowner can be environmentally-responsible in caring for the landscape. This is similar to the idea of growing natives in your landscape. The idea being the reduction of the homeowners' input of resources. By making this one change, homeowners can conserve water, fertilizer and reduce their impact on the environment.

In Sedgwick County at the courthouse, we trialed some of the Earth-Kind®Roses since 2013. We are trialing four polyantha roses listed as follows:

- Cecile Brunner
- La Marne
- Marie Daly
- Sea Foam

The requirements for growing Earth-Kind Roses successfully are placing them in a full day of direct sun or at least eight hours. They must have good air movement around the leaves to prevent foliar diseases. Good drainage is also recommended. They do well in a variety of soil types including poorly aerated, highly alkaline clay soils. To help your roses in any soil type, add three inches of plant-derived compost. Watering from the soil level with drip irrigation keeps water off the leaves and conserves water by lessening the amount to evaporation. Also watering from the ground level keeps the leaves clean of "salty" water and here in Sedgwick County we add salt to improve the water quality, but we would add to burning the foliage of the roses if overhead watering were done. Lastly, mulching roses is also recommended which keeps the weeds down, conserves more water, can add nitrogen as it breaks down and mitigates the drastic temperature fluctuations in the soil. Mulch acts as an insulator like a blanket on the soil. Mulch should only be placed around the roses at a depth of 3- inches. Placing the mulch too deep can become a barrier to needed oxygen in the soil.

The Earth-Kind Rose bed which we have at the southwest side of the building follows most of the recommended requirements for their success. They get plenty of air movement, but they do get only about 6 hours of direct sun and about an hour of indirect sun. They also received plenty of compost before planting. There were signs of thrips after they were initially planted. We suspect thrips came in on these plants. Other than the initial insect problem there was some dieback after the first winter. We did purchase roses from what we thought was a reputable grower. Be sure to purchase healthy roses. We ordered on-line, so we had to totally rely on the grower to pick healthy product. We pruned out the dead stems and they bloomed well through the first season. They have received regular watering from the ground level.

In the second growing season, we went into the winter after a brutal cold snap in November 2014. The daytime temperature started at 75 degrees and ended up at minus 7 in a matter of a few hours. This kind of a drop is not enough for plants to acclimate to the change. The roses looked like they were frozen in place. We had a significant amount of dieback going into the spring and the new growth was slow to appear. Of the Earth-Kind Roses that we did trial, Cecil Brunner and La Marne were the hardest hit with significant dieback. It mid to late June before new growth appeared. This was partly due to a wet and cold spring which continued into late May. Overall, other than the initial thrips, these roses have had no other disease or pest issues.

In both 2015 and 2016, the roses were slow to start growing due to the colder springs. They ended in the fall blooming until a hard frost and had no disease or insect issues.

Roses are a high maintenance plant. They need to be deadheaded. Their blossoms need to be cleaned out of the bed every day to prevent fungal diseases such as black spot. They are heavy feeders. They prefer ground level irrigation. To have a rose type that can do well with less input, helps to conserve water and reduce pesticides in our soil.

I would recommend giving them a try. There are other types of roses other than polyantha shrubs which are dwarf and medium. There are small shrubs and climbers within the list of choices. Plenty of different types to add to your landscape.