

Rose Seed Propagation

By Albert Ford

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On the threshold of fall, your roses are doing some interesting things. They are in the process of converting spent flowers into seeds, for one thing. If after the middle of September, you ceased deadheading, you have increased the probability of the rose bush producing viable seeds from which an entirely new rose might germinate--if you do a few simple things.

1. Collect Mature Hips: Regardless of time of year, if a rose bloom remains on the bush after the flower has faded and degeneration of the petals begins to take place, the rose bush will begin to form a seed pod (rose hip). Sometimes the entire spent flower will turn brown. Such a hip will not produce viable seeds and should be ignored and pruned away in your late fall pruning. On the other hand, more often than not, the calyx tube (enlarged part just below the sepals) of the spent flower will begin to swell and gradually change color from green to red or orange. Some hips remain green and do not change color. After the hip has changed color, it is mature and can be harvested. I generally wait until after the first heavy frost, at which time, I pick the green as well as the red and orange hips. The hips from a specific rose bush should be placed in a container on which the variety's name is written.

2. Shelling the Hips: Any time after harvesting the hips, they can be opened and the seeds removed. Opening the hip can be done with a knife. Don't worry about cutting through a seed, they are very hard. Drop the seeds into a glass of water to which a teaspoon of Clorox has been added. Those that drop to the bottom of the glass (sinkers) have a much greater probability of germinating than those that float on the surface (floaters).

3. Stratification: Subjecting seeds to the cold of refrigeration (35°F, not freezing) is referred to as "stratification." I place my rose seed in separate containers with a little moist peat moss. (I use empty 35mm film canisters). Mark each container with the name of the rose variety that produced the seed. Place containers in refrigerator for 45 to 60 days.

4. Planting the Seeds: The seeds are planted in a tray (about an inch or more in depth). They are placed 1/4 inch below the surface of the growing medium, covered and kept moist. I use Pro-Mix as a growing medium and place the seed trays under grow-lights. The secret is to keep the medium moist, but not wet. Set timer to have lights on for 16 hours, off for 8.

5. Seedling Treatment: A seedling may appear in as little as two weeks, but it generally takes longer. The first two leaves that appear are cotyledons; the third leaf to appear is a true rose leaf. After two or more rose leaves are visible, I carefully transplant the seedling into a three inch plastic pot, keep it under grow-lights and give it a few drops of a weak solution of Miracle Gro (1/2 teaspoon to a quart of water). A flower may appear in as little as three weeks. Keep track of the variety; if it is a good rose, you may want to give it a name and get it patented. Good luck!

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