

## Report for David Austin Rose pruning course

Eva Glendinning, currently doing a HBGTP 1 year training programme at Chatsworth Gardens in Derbyshire. Before becoming a gardening trainee in September 2015, I have held various administrative roles and often worked in the hospitality sector but I also spent 3 years doing part-time garden maintenance work.

I received £50 from the Royal Manchester Botanics and the Northern Counties Trust to attend a Professional Pruning Course at David Austin Roses (Albrighton, Wolverhampton). It was a day course and cost £75. The training took place at the nursery on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2016.

The day consisted of a presentation, a walk around the garden and breeding programme area, the opportunity to ask questions and a demonstration of planting a rose. During the presentation we were shown photos of different types of roses in flower, and were told how to prune them.

We were told that it's best to leave some roses alone, such as wild roses, ramblers, china roses and single-flowering roses (which you could identify in winter by the fact there are no hips left on the bush), and not really prune them.

Repeat-flowering shrub roses, which would have evidence of flowers on them when you come to do pruning between January and February, would be pruned back between a 1/3<sup>rd</sup> and 2/3<sup>rd</sup>. The amount you prune depends on how tall you want the shrub to be. If you have a shrub rose at the back of a border you would prune it less than you would if it was at the front of a border because at the front of the border you would want it to be a bit shorter. I found it interesting that it's apparently not at all important to cut back to a bud, or making a sloping cut and that actually roses respond very well to being cut with hedge trimmers, and the only reason they are no longer used at the nursery is because it can be tricky pulling the trimmings out of the centre of a prickly shrub after the hedge trimming. Also you would have to go through the shrub afterwards anyway to take out the dead, diseased and damaged stems, as well as a few of the older, central stems as overcrowding and reduced airflow is one of the biggest causes of disease in rose shrubs.

It was suggested that Hybrid Teas often aren't pruned hard enough. They should be pruned back by 1/2 to 3/4 and could be cut right down if necessary.

Climbers are trained to a framework, and pruned back to that framework each year. It takes about three years for them to establish fully and produce many flowers. Shrub roses often make good climbers because they will flower right from the base to the top. One by the door to the training room, 'A Shropshire Lad' was pointed out as being a particularly good one. Roses don't like being tied in too much, and we were advised not to be over-enthusiastic with tying-in for the sake of neatness.

The first step in having good roses is choosing the right variety for the position and function the rose is to serve, for example you wouldn't plant a vigorous rambler on a small arch. If you went to the nursery around May/June time you could choose one of the 700 varieties grown there that pleases you and receive advice on whether it would grow well in the area you want it to. At David Austin's they can advise you on which specific rose would be good growing as a hedge, over an arch, up a north-facing wall, flopping over a path etc. You could plant potted roses any time of year but it's always better to plant bare-root plants, which would arrive between November and May. Once they arrive, you would soak them in water for 30 mins and plant it quite deep with the graft union at least 5cm below ground level, using Mycorrhizal fungi (David Austin sell their own special formula). You then generally leave roses alone for the first three years to establish and produce many stems at the base. At the nursery they start pruning after Christmas, removing all the leaves at the same time, the beds are mulched after all the pruning is done and the beds cleared. They no longer use manure because after 30 years of applying manure, their soil was so nutrient rich that it was poisoning the roses, so they now apply a nutrient poor mulch, but didn't say which one specifically. They have their soil tested every year now, and said it was a good idea to test to soil before planting an extensive rose bed. The roses are given foliar feeds, and sprayed with fungicides in the growing season. SB Invigorator was recommended.

I found the walk around the area where the breeding programme takes place very interesting. David Austin English Roses have been bred to have a more natural, loose shape, with large, often scented flowers. Their breeding programme costs around a million pounds a year, it takes about 7 years to produce a new variety, and they produce about three new varieties each year from 180,000 or so crosses. The process of doing the crosses, collecting the seed, selecting 12,000 young plants from 400,000 seedlings, and from those selecting a few to be budded out in the field and trialled out there for a few seasons sounds quite intensive.

Although the presentation, questions and answers throughout the day were very informative, I would have liked to put some of the theory into practice, and pruned some roses under the guidance of the nursery staff. I find doing things repetitively sometimes helps me to remember how to do things.

I found the emphasis on how hard it is to kill a rose very encouraging. In my future career, I hope to carry that lesson with me, and get stuck in when I come across a rose around January/February time. I have in fact already pruned some roses with extra enthusiasm and confidence after attending the course.

Me stood next to the demonstration planting hole



A climber trained up a wall, it could be 'Generous Gardener' good for a north facing wall



In a rose garden, shrubs of the same variety are best planted together in blocks of 3 plants or more to create more impact.



Roses pruned back hard