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Living

Essentials of Spring Pruning and Mulching Roses

The secret behind an attractive bed of roses is to keep it healthy and neat by pruning. Look for dead or damaged canes, and remove them in early spring while the plant is still dormant. When the leaves have budded, you can come back to get anything you may have missed earlier. Spring is also a good time to begin fertilizing. Martha likes to feed each of her plants 3/4 cup of Rose-tone, a 6-6-4 fertilizer, monthly through September.

Mulching helps the soil retain water, keeps the roots cool during the summer, and inhibits weed growth. It is important to mulch new roses because the roots are immature and need the protection. Martha prefers Sweet Peet mulch, made of wood shavings and manure.

Mulch should not be spread deeply; a 2-inch-thick layer is enough to hold in moisture and keep weeds from growing. Smooth the mulch with a garden rake, and don't let it pile up against the plants base. Some plants respond better than others do to particular types of mulch; trees do well with hardwood mulch, whereas salt hay is effective in a vegetable garden. Whichever type you use, make sure it has been well composted to prevent it from burning the roots. Do not forget to give your plants enough water and in areas with very cold winters, remember to put out more mulch in the fall to keep the plants from heaving.

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