



# The Organic Rose Watch Factsheet



**Introduction.** ‘The Organic Rose Watch’ aimed to collect information on roses and how they are being managed in gardens across the UK. The idea was to collect information from as many gardeners as possible and combine it to give a picture of what roses are being grown and how they are fairing around the country. It was also hoped that the survey would provide some novel suggestions for organic rose management techniques.

At the same time, HDRA researchers also sought out information from more formal research programmes on rose varieties and rose management techniques. By combining information from the survey and the research we had hoped to identify the problems that gardeners are facing, and to be able to suggest realistic strategies that they can use to manage their roses in a more environmentally friendly and organic manner.

This factsheet aims to summarise the information gathered during the project and to point to some of the ways forward. The project results have also been summarised in a technical leaflet ‘*Organic Management Practices for Roses*’ and some of the information was incorporated in the book ‘*Perfect Roses*’ by Sue Stickland (see further information section at the end for more details).

**Who took part?** 258 people registered an interest in taking part, both HDRA members and non-members. Of these 63 returned completed forms with observations. A further 146 people expressed an interest in receiving information about the watch. It would be fair to say that many of those who returned their forms had a great deal of experience with growing roses (ten or more years) and many had a large number of rose plants (commonly 20 or more) in their gardens.

**Where are roses grown?** Respondents were from all parts of the UK (and one or two from abroad) and most grew roses in their own gardens, and in a variety of positions. Some were laid out formally in dedicated beds but others were more informally laid out in mixed plantings. There were a few returns from people who appeared to have large and formally laid out collections.

**What roses are grown?** A large number of rose types and varieties (594 in total!) were recorded on the returned forms. The most popular growth forms were climbers and bush or shrub type roses. Some miniatures and ground cover roses were also noted. Although many people did not specifically classify their roses, modern roses like hybrid teas and floribundas were the most commonly grown types. However, old garden roses like gallicas, albas and bourbons were also very popular. See the table opposite for a summary of the most popular rose varieties recorded across sites. A more detailed list is available in the complete report (see further information section).

Variety	No Sites	Rose Type
Iceberg	24	floribunda, climbing types
Buff Beauty	17	hybrid musk
M. Alfred Carrière	16	noisette climber
Compassion	14	hybrid tea climber
Zéphirine Drouhin	12	bourbon climber
Albertine	11	rambler or climber
Gertrude Jekyll	11	English rose
Golden Showers	11	floribunda climber
Rosa Mundi	11	gallica (gallica versicolor)
Cornelia	10	hybrid musk
Penelope	10	hybrid musk
Queen Elizabeth	10	floribunda
Silver Jubilee	10	hybrid tea





**What management practices are used?** Nearly three quarters (73%) of those who responded said they used organic methods. In keeping with this, only a third (29%) used synthetic fertilizers and a fifth (21%) synthetic pesticides (mainly to control fungal diseases and aphids). It is clear that people practice a large number of different management regimes and many of the components of these are detailed below.

**General approach:** taking an overview of the survey, two different approaches to managing roses seem to emerge; one is a highly interventionist approach in which growers constantly check their roses and react when they perceive problems as compared to a second, more relaxed approach, in which the grower rarely intervenes, with, in some cases, a growing style bordering on neglect. In the latter group some 10% of respondents were of the opinion that the best approach for success was putting roses in the right place and then leaving them to develop naturally. In the former 13% checked their roses regularly in order to be able to take prompt actions when necessary.

**Pruning:** 38% of those who replied mentioned pruning as being integral to their management regime. The majority of people who mentioned it tended to prune over the winter period from the after the first frost to March. Some pruned two or more times a year, especially to cut out infected shoots.

**Cleaning and hygiene:** 27% carried out some combination of hygiene measures including cutting off diseased leaves, pruning diseased branches to sweeping up and destroying shed leaves. These methods obviously overlap to some extent with pruning (see above) and deadheading (see below).

**Feeding:** four fifths (83%) fed their roses in some way and 23% considered it to be crucial to success with roses. The most popular 'feeds' were compost (usually home made) or proprietary rose fertilisers (especially among 'non-organic' respondents). Also popular were farmyard manure (especially horse manure and chicken manure). Specific nutrients like blood and bone meal, phostrogen, tomorite and lime were also frequently used. Some people also used liquid feeds like seaweeds or other home made sprays (comfrey and nettle).

**Watering:** Just over half the respondents (57%) water their roses, usually in order to establish new bushes and in hot dry periods. Some considered that appropriate or adequate watering was crucial to success with roses (7%).

**Mulch:** 18% mentioned mulching as an important practice. Mulch material included home made compost, rotted straw and a variety of other materials including grass clippings. Mulch is laid at various times but perhaps most commonly in the spring.

**Deadheading:** 12% used deadheading as part of their management regime.

**Other practices:** a range of other practices were each mentioned by a few people. These included intercropping or companion planting (8%), use of resistant varieties (e.g. portlands/ rugosas) (5%), maintaining a weed or plant free area around the base of the roses at least for part of the season or rotation (5%), improving air circulation (either by siting or pruning) (3%), use of mycorrhiza fungi (2%) and iron water (watering roses using water in which iron screws have been placed) (2%).



Iceberg– the most widely grown rose in the Organic Rose Watch





A range of other practices aimed at pest and disease management were also mentioned including encouraging biological control, especially birds to eat aphids (8%), spraying (usually Rose Clear or similar product (not organic gardeners) (6%) and squashing aphids by hand (3%). These are discussed more fully below.

**What pests and diseases were mentioned?** Black spot was by far the most commonly reported disease (=78% of sites) followed by aphids (=32% of sites). Both powdery mildew and rust were also commonly observed (22% and 19% of sites). Apart from aphids, insect pests were less commonly observed than diseases. When averaged over sites the severity of these pests and diseases tended to be between 3 (some obvious symptoms) and 5 (moderate amount present) with diseases tending to be scored slightly worse than pests. Obviously they were considerably worse on some sites as compared to others and there was a degree of variation over sites and during the course of the season. When asked to list other pests and diseases that normally affect roses and which were not prevalent in this season most mentioned the same problems indicating that this season was a good snapshot of a typical season.



**Black spot**– the most commonly reported disease across sites

A considerable amount of effort goes into management of black spot and aphids. Management methods used tend towards general cultural controls, especially in sites that are managed organically, but also include pesticides in many cases.

**Black spot:** In the case of black spot, the most important management practices that people picked out included:

- 1) **Attention to hygiene:** 52% of people reported removing dead and diseased leaves which they also often collect and destroy by burning or throwing them out. Many people regularly check their roses in order to accomplish this.
- 2) **Pruning:** 22% of returns specifically mentioned pruning, cutting out diseased branches or stems, as a method of managing black spot. Pruning can also have the effect of opening out the rose canopy and reducing humidity around the leaves.
- 3) **Sprays:** various sprays including fungicides (e.g. Rose Clear which is not acceptable to organic gardeners) and various organic sprays (e.g. seaweed, biosept, iron water) were mentioned by different people (21%).
- 4) **Mulching:** 17% use mulch, generally homemade compost, which is a popular management method that helps to bury spores and to prevent splashback.
- 5) **Feeding:** 13% tried to keep roses healthy with various rose feeds, both organic and non-organic.
- 6) **Companion planting:** especially with alliums is quite a popular option for managing black spot (9%)
- 7) **Resistant varieties:** only a few people (8%) mentioned resistant varieties or the importance of picking good ones which are not susceptible to black spot. In this survey there is some indication that the severity of black spot differs between varieties. However it is unclear whether this is due to natural plant susceptibility or other (perhaps more site specific) causes.

**Aphids:** these are generally removed by hand, by using soft soap spray or a pesticide. However, many commented that if left alone they usually disappear during the course of the season (by the end of July). This is a common observation on organic field crops and is probably due to the build up of aphid predators and parasites.





**Concluding comments:** participants provided a wide range of observations and comments on roses and rose management. At one extreme many people are content to practice minimal intervention whilst managing their roses, whilst at the other many expend a large amount of management effort. Both approaches can provide good healthy roses and a great deal of enjoyment. The overall sentiment expressed was to grow roses that you enjoy and pick those types that suit your management style.

**Moving Forward With The Organic Rose Watch:** the rose watch seems to have generated a fair degree of interest, especially amongst more experienced rose growers. To take it forward we had planned on putting in place a project using a mixture of field and lab research to investigate the effectiveness of some of the management practices suitable for organic gardeners. However, we have had difficulty in attracting sufficient funds to develop this project and instead are making several suggestions for continuing with the theme. These are outlined below:



Zéphirine Drouhin  
– another popular variety

- 1) continuing with a simplified rose watch, sending out simplified forms to interested rose growers over a number of seasons and encourage participants to experiment and observe the effects of different management regimes,
- 2) extending the watch to do simple trials of promising techniques in order to build up a knowledge base including:
  - a. *simple observation trials*: recording what happens on roses in any season, for instance noting parts of garden where disease occurs, and ask participants to make correlations with other factors such as shade or watering.
  - b. *simple comparison trials*: trying out some simple and benign treatments (e.g. Savona, Seaweed, plant stimulants, mulches, soot).
- 3) creating mechanisms to share information and learn about rose management, including:
  - a. constructing and maintaining an interactive website on organic rose management
  - b. having an organic rose management newsletter (say every 6 months, linked to the website)
  - c. running an e-mail newslst (also linked to website and newsletter),



Finally, **many thanks to all those who took part** and **please let us know your comments on the rose watch**, especially how you would like to see it continue or how you would like to see us develop the information to help you to grow roses in a more environmentally friendly and organic manner.

Gareth Davies, HDRA, 15 September 2005

**Further information:**

'*Organic Management Practices for Roses*' by Gareth Davies and Sue Stickland, published by Emmerson Press for HDRA, 22 pages. Contact HDRA for copies. Also available at <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/>.

'*Perfect Roses*' by Sue Stickland, Impact Publishing Green Essentials– Organic Guides, Series, 64 pages, £2.99.

'*Organic Rose Watch– Report*' by Gareth Davies, available from HDRA and on HDRA website.

