



## **Rose Rosette Disease: *How to identify and deal with this destructive disease.***

Across the country, rose plants are dying from Rose Rosette Disease, also known as “witch’s broom”. If you have roses, you may have already heard of this destructive disease. If this is the first time you’ve heard of Rose Rosette, be warned ... if your roses are infected *“There is no cure yet, and this disease is spreading like wildfire.”* says Eric Taylor, Horticulture Manager of Roundtree Landscaping.

### **What is Rose Rosette Disease?**



*The flush of foliage at the top of the stem gives the rose the “witch’s broom” effect.*

Rose Rosette disease is caused by a virus spread by a tiny Eriophyid mite named *Phyllocoptes fructiphilus*. The disease only affects plants of the genus *Rosa*, but it does affect *all* roses. There are no rose varieties that are resistant to the disease. Over the past year, we’ve seen a dramatic rise in the cases of Rose Rosette across the country. Because shrub roses like Knock Out® roses have been planted en masse, the disease has been able to spread to more of these plants at a fast rate.

### **Are Your Roses Infected with Rose Rosette?**

How do you know if your roses have Rose Rosette? There are specific signs you should look for. Infected plants can have one or all of these symptoms:

- Overabundance of foliage, especially at the tops of branches, giving it the “witch’s broom” effect.
- Leaves and branches are bright red and are distorted or twisted.
- Excessive thorns along the stems that are also very bright red.
- Lack of winter hardiness.

**Notice the extreme flush of foliage on the plant in the photo, giving it the “witch’s broom” effect.** This is the most noticeable sign of the disease. However, the same growth distortion can be created by drift of broadleaf weed killer onto rose foliage. If your plants exhibit more than one of the signs listed above, then plants are most likely infected with rose rosette. We highly recommend calling a professional to come inspect your plants.



**Rose Rosette Disease takes about two years to kill your rose plant.** The average lifespan for roses infected with rose rosette is 22 months. In this time, though, the mite will have most likely spread to your other roses, your neighbor’s roses and beyond.

### Treatment Options

Unfortunately, there is no cure for Rose Rosette Disease. Because the disease can take so much time to kill the plant, it’s common to think that certain treatments may have “cured” the plant. **However, the best action you can take is to remove all infected plants, from the root system up.** Infected root tissue left behind in the soil can sprout new infected shoots.

You’ll also need to remove any leaf litter and debris from the bed, as this is where the mites can take refuge. Don’t use a leaf blower to remove the leaf litter - remove it manually and bag it. Infected plants and leaves should not be added to the compost pile. Bag them up and put it in the trash to avoid spreading to other roses.

While some are experimenting with selective pruning techniques (cutting out infected shoots), there is no evidence yet that shows pruning is an effective treatment. Often, shoots that are infected may not show symptoms for many months. Also, the mites may still be on the plant and can spread Rose Rosette to new shoots. Therefore, pruning should not be considered a reliable treatment.

### Can I Spray?

Unfortunately, most topical and systemic mite treatments available to homeowners are not effective at killing the mite that carries the virus. Also, the mites are very tiny so treatment coverage may not reach all the mites. If you have removed infected plants in your garden and have other roses that don’t yet appear to be infected, you can apply certain sprays through spring. Treatments include horticultural oils and insecticidal soaps applied to the uninfected plants in an attempt to prevent infection. But again, coverage may not be adequate to kill all the mites before they infect new plants.

### I’ve Pulled My Roses: Now What?

Once roses infected with Rose Rosette have been removed from your landscape, it's tempting to plant new roses in the same spot right away. However, remember that tiny pieces of infected root tissue can sprout new infected shoots; which can then potentially reintroduce the virus to your landscape. It’s best to wait a year or two before planting new roses. We love roses, however there are many other beautiful shrub options. Also be on the lookout for Rose Rosette in your neighbor’s roses. If they are infected, it’s only a matter of time before your roses will become infected.

Slowing the spread of Rose Rosette Disease depends on all of us working together to spot the signs early and remove infected roses as quickly as possible.

**If you believe your roses show signs of Rose Rosette Disease, contact us immediately to inspect and remove them if necessary.**

