



What's killing the roses?

June is here and it is starting to get hot and humid. My plants are looking pretty good in the garden. I don't water my lawn but it has gotten really green thanks to the occasional "pop-up showers" we have been having. I deadheaded a few of my roses recently and thought about the rose rosette disease. I would surely hate to lose my beautiful roses to this dreaded disease. Recently I have had a number of people ask about this disease.

Rose rosette is a devastating disease that is a threat to cultivated roses everywhere no matter the cultivar. This disease is alive and well here in Shelby County. Losses can occur in home and commercial landscapes, as well as botanical gardens and nurseries.

Rose rosette symptoms are observed during the spring and intensifies as the season progresses. The symptoms are magnified depending on the cultivar, plant age and growing conditions. The common common symptoms of rose rosette are:

- Increased growth and/or rapid elongation of shoots
- Abnormal red discoloration of shoots and foliage
- Witches broom (prolific clustering of small shoots)
- Spiral pattern of cane growth
- Shortening of internodes
- Distorted or dwarfed leaves
- Overabundance of thorns

Rose bushes may decline from this disease in one season or symptoms may continue to intensify for several seasons before the plant dies. By the time the plant exhibits multiple symptoms implicating rose rosette, the disease is well-advanced and may have already spread to other roses.



Rose rosette virus is spread by the Eriophyid mite. These tiny mites are only visible with the aid of a microscope. They cannot fly but they crawl to nearby plants if leaves or canes are touching. The mites can also move from plant to plant via air flow or by attaching themselves to insects. They overwinter on rose canes and lay eggs in developing shoots.

Infected plants, including the roots, must be removed completely. These diseased plants should be removed immediately so that the pathogen will not spread to healthy plants. Where permitted, infected plants may be destroyed by burning. It is always difficult to tell homeowners to remove their roses when they are infected with this disease. Our plant and pest specialists (Dr. Windham and Dr. Hale) are looking for ways to control the eriophyid mites. Results will be available from their research in the near future.

If you are a rose lover like me I know you can't wait until a way is found to control or eradicate these mites. Keep your fingers crossed! I would not be able to stand destroying all of my beautiful rose bushes if they become infected with this disease. Until next time, happy gardening!



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