

Pruning our Old Tea Roses

What I am talking about, in particular, here is our beautiful old teas at Rookwood Necropolis but it really does apply to all of the old tea roses – those at Rookwood, Rumsey and in our home gardens. There are many opinions on what is the right thing for pruning the teas and I am not a “guru” – I only, like many others, have an opinion. However, I am going to quote and summarise information gleaned from the real gurus and the following dot points can be credited to:

1. Discussions with the late Gillian Batchen – HRiA member, previous Coordinator Sydney Group Heritage Roses and heavily involved with the initial planning and planting at both The Rumsey Garden, Parramatta Park and Barbara’s Garden at Rookwood.
2. Discussions with Billy West – HRiA member and co-author of the book “Tea Roses – Old Roses for Warm Gardens”
3. Books:
 - a) Tea Roses – Old Roses for Warm Gardens by Lynne Chapman, Noelene Drage, Di Durston, Jenny Jones, Hillary Merrifield and Billy West. Page 63.
 - b) Shrub Roses in Australia & New Zealand by Deane Ross. Page 67.
 - c) Old Fashioned Roses for Australian Gardens by Heather Rumsey. Page 87.

Based on the above I would like us to adopt the following as a guide for pruning the teas at Barbara’s Garden, Rookwood and The Rumsey Garden, Parramatta:

- With new plants – in general leave alone, as much as possible, for 5 years. In the interim dead head as appropriate and in the winter gently shape and remove the twiggy growth.
- Established bushes:
 - Dead head continuously with a really good dead head say end January so they are ready for their best flowering in autumn. If you shorten the stems by about three eyes when removing spent blooms and hips you will produce a well-shaped plant.
 - Remove deadwood and damaged branches as they appear.
 - Shape with a gentle trim as you would a shrub.
 - If you are wanting to reduce the size of the plant always leave it until winter and never remove more than one third of the bush.
 - Remember the teas nearly always resent hard pruning!

The photo is of our beautiful old ‘found’ tea at Rookwood, Agnes Smith. This plant is opposite Barbara’s Garden next to Old Souls Chapel and was taken mid-January so not during its peak flowering but it still looks a lovely bush. If dead headed say early February it should be a picture in autumn. This is what a tea rose bush should look like.

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