

Rose Rosette Disease

By Charles Shaner – Consulting Rosarian - Shenandoah Rose Society

Rose Rosette Disease (RRD) is a viral-like disease that is a danger to all ornamental roses. It is contagious and almost always results in the death of the rose. It was thought that Virginia was free of RRD but there were two confirmed cases in the state in 2001 – one in Albermarle Co. near Palmyra and the other in Ben Lomond Old Rose Garden in Manassas where 20 old garden roses had to be destroyed. I know of three confirmed cases in Virginia in 2002, one in Harrisonburg, one in Staunton in Thornrose Cemetery and the other in my rose garden. I had to destroy one Perfume Delight and one Kardinal due to RRD. In 2003 there were numerous cases reported in the Staunton, VA area.

Rose Rosette Disease is carried by the microscopic wingless Eriophyte Mite. These mites are carried by wind currents and can randomly drop into a rose. It is also thought that the mite may hitch a ride on trucks traveling the interstate highways. Most infected bushes I have had were where the air current caught a down draft (i.e. where the wind come over the top of a building or trees). Symptoms may not appear for weeks or months. RRD is spreading unchecked through the wild rose population of the Midwest, South and Eastern U.S.A. From infected wild roses, RRD spreads to cultivated roses.

The impact of RRD can be minimized if you recognize the symptoms early and respond quickly. It is described in scientific literature as a potential biological method of week control for '*R.multiflora*'. It was established with the help of the USDA and states in the 1930's. *R.multiflora* is a reservoir to harbor this disease and enable its spread. RRD can infect almost any rose on which the mite lands and feeds.

RRD has a different affect on the rose than other diseases. Instead of the cane dying, vigorous growth that is both rampant and contorted appears. Growth may or may not be in the pattern of a witches broom. Death of the affected cane comes later. Diagnosis of RRD is confirmed Rose Rosette Disease may be found in 'nearby' roses. Nearby means in the same bed, the same city block, the same county or any place where a wind burst can deposit a dislodged infection-carrying microscopic mite. In virtually every case of RRD I have diagnosed, I was able to find an infected *R.multiflora* within 100 yards.

There is no one set of symptoms that can be used to diagnose RRD especially in the early stages. Symptoms will differ from different parentage in different seasons and at different stages of growth. The leaves and stems will be an ugly shade of reddish purple and so contorted as to be indistinguishable one from another. If the rose has been infected for several months, a rosette will form at the end of the cane. Symptoms will vary, but if you suspect a rose in infected, removing it quickly is a prudent action. Digging up and isolating the questionable rose may also be considered although I have never been able to save a bush even with a slight infection. Once you have removed a bush, do not plant another rose there for two years. The roots left behind have been know to put up infected shoots as much as 18 months later.

Once a rose in infected, there is no cure! There is a prevention and that is to spray every 10 days with Avid. Cygon2E was the recommended spray but the EPA has pulled Cygon2E from the market. This is the only spray that will kill the mite that carries the disease. There is no 'organic' control. If you think you may have a rose with RRD, start

spraying the surrounding roses every 5 days with Avid. RRD is contagious and can be spread by you pruners. If you prune an infected bush, clean your pruners with the old style Lysol. Bleach may also be used but bleach is hard on pruners. If you wash the bleach off and apply a light coating of oil, your pruners will be fine.

Rosa Multiflora (wild roses) spread rapidly and if left unchecked will take over fields, fence rows and grow fast in wood lands. I have seen bushes the size of a tractor trailer. Large bushes can produce upwards of one million seeds per year. Birds love to nest in them and eat the seeds from the hips. Once the seed passes through a bird, it will germinate twice as fast. If you have a case of RRD, check around your property and the property that borders you on all sides. If you find a *R.Multiflora* on your neighbors property, see if you can work with him to get it removed. The best disposal of these bushes and your infected ornamental roses is by burning to kill the mites and the disease. If you are in an area where you can not burn or burning is not safe, be sure to spray the bush first with Avid to kill the mites and then remove the bush a day or two later. If you do not spray the bush first, as the bush dies, the mites will catch a wind current looking for a new home which may be your roses.

Revised 09-28-06