

Don't allow fungus diseases to ruin the appearance of your roses.

In our area the three most common rose diseases are black spot, powdery mildew, and rust. The worst of the three is black spot. The first sign of trouble begins when dark spots appear on leaves. Then the infected leaves turn yellow and begin to fall. The result is an unsightly, weakened plant subject to dieback. Rust begins with orange or yellow pustules under the leaves. Once infected, the leaves turn an ugly brown before withering and falling off. Powdery mildew looks like the leaves are covered with powdered sugar. It's not overly harmful to the plant, but it looks horrible and can weaken the plant by reducing photosynthesis. When it comes to these diseases, the best offense is a good defense.

Replace highly susceptible roses with ones labeled as resistant. Find out some really great roses that are much more disease resistant in my friend's book 'Growing Roses in the Pacific Northwest' by Nita-Jo Rountree. Plant your new rose in morning sun where foliage tends to dry sooner, and avoid wetting foliage when watering. If you can't bear to part with a favorite rose that is prone to these blights, it may be necessary to apply protective sprays once per week to prevent these diseases from gaining a foothold, particularly in rainy weather. Remove any infected leaves ASAP, and then spray thoroughly with Neem oil. Also labeled as 'Rose Defense', neem oil is an environmentally friendly product that is highly effective if applied before the leaves become infected. Store the neem oil somewhere sufficiently warm. When it's cold, the oil forms a blob that is extremely hard to mix with water in order to spray effectively.