

Raised Beds for Roses

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I have known for years that the ground where I live did not drain very well. My roses did exceptionally well in hot dry weather. The problem was even more evident in the fact that the grass stayed green and grew in hot dry weather about six feet out from the rose bed when the rest of my lawn was brown and dry. The problem became even more evident in the summer of 2003 when we had much more rain fall than normal. I am also fighting clay, shale and lime stone.

I decided it was time to go to raised beds which would mean moving my 175 rose bushes. This would also mean designing the mechanics of building the raised beds and getting the proper soil to replant my roses. I knew from the start that I would not get it done in one season as in my area we have a two month window for moving roses.

The first job was to design and build the beds. For ease of handling, I used 2"x10"x8' pressure treated lumber. 4x4 post cut in 9.5" lengths were used for the corners and every 4 feet to accommodate cross braces and joints in a long bed. I am building my beds 48' long by 4' wide so I use a 2x4 cross brace every 4 feet. You could go wider with your beds as some would say you should. The width is up to you. At 4' wide, I can still put in two rows of roses per bed if I stagger them. I use the Mister irrigation system and the rose heads cover a 4' pattern so the 4' width works very well. The whole thing is bolted together with 1/4" x 3 1/2" lag bolts. This will make it easier in the future if a board needs to be replaced.

Now that brings on the job of filling in the frame with the proper soil mixture. For this I used a good top soil blended with just a small amount of composted hard wood bark. This gives me a mixture that is rich in organics, will drain well and will not pack tight.

The next process was to move my roses to the newly prepared beds. In digging up the bushes I discovered just how bad this needed to be done. We had not had that much rain during the winter and into the early spring. You would think the ground would be on the dry side. **WRONG!** When my bushes came up, the mud was caked on the roots and water almost dripping from them. The bushes had a very limited root structure because of all the moisture. I carefully cleaned as much mud as possible from the roots and planted them in my new beds as a bare root rose. I then mulched my beds with Pine Bark mulch and reinstalled my irrigation system.

Within four weeks I could see the difference in the bushes I had moved. They had not only caught up with the roses I had not moved but in some cases passed them. I am also seeing larger, healthier canes. Within six weeks I was even getting a few blooms.

Raised beds have many benefits and grow better roses. In addition to better drainage and being better able to control the soil conditions, it is much easier on the back. It seems the older I get the further away the ground gets.

