

# ***You Don't Need To Be Stuck By Thorns***

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Growing Roses With Satish

A long time ago, I remember working in the rose garden every weekend and on Monday morning, during the first pause in work, I would settle down in the holding room with alcohol swabs and a 23- gauge hypodermic needle to extricate a few thorns in my fingers, acquired during the weekend activities. I started thinking, that there simply must be a better way to do this.

I had seen enough pictures of rose-heroes wounded by rose thorns on forearms and scalp, showing bleeding from those injuries on Facebook. It is my contention that posting this type of picture can potentially turn off a would-be rose grower and hence it is an absolute no-no!



Then I started thinking: Why does one get stuck? The thorns are sitting on the stems, minding their own business. They will not jump on you like an attack-trained dog. Therefore, it is clear, we are flinging ourselves or our body parts at the thorns so that they can stick us!

Can we all agree on this one point? The second fact is that all thorns are positioned pointing downwards. This means that if we approach each stem from above downwards while we are attempting to hold a stem, the chances of getting stuck are negligible to none. Wearing a pair of leather gloves further reduces the incidence and intensity of these sticks. On the contrary, if our hand approaches a stem with an upwardly directed motion, we are inviting the thorn to

stick us and they will, even if you are wearing a glove. Further, grasp a stem gently as you are approaching it with a careful downward movement. If you feel the beginnings of a prick through your gloves, you can let go, regroup, and try this maneuver again.

The only other point one must remember is never to dive into the heart of a bush for cutting off that dead cane or any other purpose. If one stretches his or her hand into the middle of the bush, although there would be no sticks as you venture in, because you are most likely to go in a downward pointed motion, you will most certainly get stuck as you start to withdraw your hand, because it is coming out in an upward pointed motion, inviting the thorns to snag you, your hand or forearm, or your sleeves.

Therefore, cutting off that dead cane from the center of the bush is never the first order of business as frequently mentioned in many articles. Rather, while pruning, one must always prune from outside toward the inside of a bush and from the top down to the bottom. To start pruning, just get close enough to a bush where with your outstretched non-dominant hand, you can hold the tip of a stem closest to you. Holding that stem by its tip, make a cut approximately two feet below where you are holding (or any other length suitable for you). Now the cut stem is safely dangling from your hand. Without getting it any closer to your body, simply place this cut stem directly into a wheelbarrow, giving it no opportunity to stick you.

Dropping cut stems on the ground to be picked up later is not a good habit, as it affords another encounter with the same stems and another chance to get stuck. Repeat this process while moving around the bush in a clockwise or anti-clockwise motion, taking down one stem at a time. After completing pruning one circle of outermost stems, start repeating this process for the next series of stems which were lying somewhere in the interior of the bush. Thus, you can complete reducing the height of each bush by approximately two feet. Now you can remove another layer of stems, each of them two feet long or a length needed to get your bush down to the final height you are trying to achieve.

Thus, when the bush is reduced to a smaller size, both in height and width, it becomes easier and safer to start reducing the number of canes if you feel that there are too many canes. Now you can safely remove the dead canes which might be in the center of this bush. Using a lopper with medium or long handles helps you further to keep your hands away from the thorns. In case you get your hands into the heart of the bush, (base) holding a regular pruner, then while withdrawing your hand, remember that the thorns on the canes are all pointing downwards and you should drag your hands along the ground, away from the rose canes and thorns.

It is my hope and dream that all rosarians would start paying attention to this simple observation so that getting stuck by rose thorns while working in the garden will truly become a thing of the past! I also hope that all CRs would promote this idea in their talks and articles.

You will find that it is not necessary to wear a so-called gauntlet glove, which covers your arm with a protective leather sleeve, or even a Tinman-Suit! I will restrict this discussion to this singular concern alone, leaving all the rest of the rules to be dealt with in a future article.

Personally, ever since I started following this method 15 years ago, I finish spring pruning over 400 bushes each year without suffering a single rose-thorn prick!