

There is a new rose disease moving into NY and it is spread with the help of the invasive *Rosa multiflora*. Rose Rosette Disease, or RRD, first shows up on the ends of rose branches making them look like they were hit with an herbicide, the look is referred to as "witch's broom". The end of an otherwise healthy branch starts to look raggedy, starts to "melt", turn brownish-red and eventually collapses. It can take a few years for the plant to completely die, but there is no cure once RRD appears.

RRD is caused by a microscopic mite known as *Phyllocoptes fructiphilus*. They are wingless and spread on the wind going from rose to rose while transmitting RRD as the mites feed on the shrubs. The invasive multiflora rose is particularly susceptible to this disease and acts as a highway for this mite and its baggage of disease. Most people are familiar with wild multiflora rose marching along our roads and over our fields. Multiflora was introduced in 1886 from Japan to the United States as rootstock for cultivated roses and to be used as a natural fence for domestic animals in areas where post fencing was not practical. Farmer's quickly learned this plant was more trouble than it was worth as it took over grazing areas faster than it could be controlled. However, it was still widely used as erosion control along new roads until the 1960's. Thanks to the highway department, and birds that eat the berries, multiflora is now pretty much everywhere in the US acting as the perfect gateway for RRD.

There is no cure for RRD once a rose gets it. The best method to fight RRD is prevention and for that you need to remove any multiflora rose near your gardens. The more you remove the better, as it will create a sort of "firewall" preventing the mite's access to your garden roses. Sadly, this disease got into Brooklyn's Cransford Rose Garden in 2005 when the disease was relatively unknown. It's believed a Knock-Out Rose was added to the collection that had the disease but was not yet showing symptoms. Knock-Out Roses are often grafted onto multiflora rootstock. The wholesale industry now understands the possibility of this and they are being very careful and screening stock for RRD, but some people still think Knock-Outs are carrying the disease. I don't believe this to be true (rose wholesalers are not looking to wipe out their cash cows), but Knock-Outs are very susceptible to RRD and if you have these roses you should always be on the lookout for the witch's broom that is first sign of RRD. If you see this indicator it is best to remove the whole rose and put it in a contractor's garbage bag and dispose of it at a landfill. Yes, I know we all hate doing that but that is the recommendation from The Rose Society. Replace the diseased shrub with something other than a rose as the disease can live in the soil for years just without the mobility of the mite.

The one good thing that might come out of this will be more multiflora rose being removed from our environment. It is also a good thing that native roses are not particularly susceptible to RRD and we hoping they might be used more in the landscape in place of other roses that do get RRD. Native roses are not a substitute for your typical shrubby garden rose (natives sucker and climb like crazy), but for the larger landscaped area they might become the new vogue.