

Revisions to lyrics of second chorus of  
“Spanish Harlem” (1960)  
Words and music by Jerry Leiber and Phil Spector  
Revisions by Bill Jackman, May 2026

For at least a decade, we have included the song “Spanish Harlem” in our final Summer-Latin medley of our annual “Summer is Here” concert at the Piedmont Center for the Arts (PCA). The song has two choruses, but I have only sung the first chorus because I have found the lyrics for the second chorus to be objectionable or implausible (infeasible).

For our June 14, 2026 concert at the PCA, I have revised the lyrics for the second chorus of “Spanish Harlem” so I can sing them. I did not change a lot of words, but the word changes I made significantly changed the meaning of the second chorus.

Original lyrics by for second chorus

There is a rose in Spanish Harlem  
A red rose up in Spanish Harlem  
With eyes as black as coal  
Then look down in my soul  
And starts a fire there  
And then I lose control  
I have to beg your pardon

**I'm going to pick that rose**

**And watch her as she grows in my garden**

**I'm going to pick that rose**

**And watch her as she grows in my garden**

### Revised lyrics by for second chorus

I could not sing the original lyrics because I found them to be objectionable or implausible (infeasible). So, I made some revisions. I did not change a lot of words, but the word changes I made significantly changed the meaning of the second chorus.

There is a rose in Spanish Harlem

A red rose up in Spanish Harlem

With eyes as black as coal

Then look down in my soul

And starts a fire there

And then I lose control

I have to beg your pardon

**I'm going to grow that rose**

**And watch her as she grows in Spanish Harlem**

**I'm going to grow that rose**

**And watch her as she grows in Spanish Harlem**

**in Spanish Harlem**

**in Spanish Harlem**

**in Spanish Harlem**

**Leaving a wild rose where it is in the street,  
so the residents of Spanish Harlem can enjoy it.**

We live in a single-family home in the Oakland flatlands with a garden where we have rose plants. We can enjoy our own roses in our own garden. This is not an option for most residents of Spanish Harlem who cannot grow roses in their gardens. The vast majority of its residents live in multi-family buildings, apartment complexes, or walk-up tenements. Less than 1 percent of the living units in Spanish Harlem (also called East Harlem) are detached single-family homes. About 86 percent of the residents of Spanish Harlem are renters. **If the wild rose is left to grow in the streets of Spanish Harlem, all can enjoy it. But if you “pick it” and relocate to your own garden, the rest cannot enjoy it.**

**Can a rose growing in the streets of New York City survive?**

A rose growing directly on the streets of NYC can absolutely survive. Varieties like the Knock Out rose or the Rugosa are famously tough and can thrive in urban conditions if given minimal protection.

**How to relocate a wild rose to your garden.**

**Note:** The following method most likely will not work for this red rose in Spanish Harlem that is growing right up through the sidewalk because you won't be able to transplant the root base.

To successfully move a rose bush, relocate it during its dormant season (late winter to early spring). Prune the bush by one-third to reduce stress, dig 12 inches out from the base to preserve the root ball, and replant in a deep, compost-enriched hole ensuring the bud union sits slightly below the soil.

## Step-by-Step Transplanting Guide

Moving a mature rose bush requires a careful approach to minimize transplant shock and encourage healthy re-establishment.

### 1. Timing is Everything

- **Ideal Window:** Move your rose bush when the plant is dormant—typically in late winter or early spring before new green foliage emerges.
- **Avoid Heat:** Do not move roses during peak summer heat or when they are actively blooming.

### 2. Prep the Bush

- **Prune:** Trim the bush back by roughly one-third. Remove any dead, diseased, or thin canes to reduce the demand on the root system while it recovers.
- **Tie it Up:** Tie the canes together gently with garden twine so they are out of the way while you dig.
- **Hydrate:** Water the bush thoroughly a day or two before the move to help keep the soil attached to the roots.

### 3. Dig and Lift

- **The Root Ball:** Use a sharp, clean spade to dig a circle around the bush about 10 to 12 inches away from the center (or right outside the drip line).
- **Loosen:** Work your spade vertically into the soil all the way around, then angle it underneath the base to cut through the deeper anchor roots.
- **Lift:** Gently pry and lift the root ball out. Try to keep as much of the native soil around the roots as possible. Place the unearthed bush onto a tarp for easy transport.

#### 4. Replant

- **Dig the New Hole:** Dig a new hole that is twice as wide and equally as deep as the root ball.
- **Amend the Soil:** Mix your native soil with a high-quality soil conditioner or compost to ensure excellent drainage and root aeration.
- **Position:** Place the rose bush in the hole, making sure it sits at the exact same depth it was at previously. The swollen bud union (where the rose variety was grafted onto the rootstock) should be about 2 inches below the soil level in cooler climates.
- **Fill and Settle:** Fill the hole halfway, press down lightly, and water thoroughly. Fill the rest of the hole, tamp gently to remove air pockets, and create a shallow "water basin" (a dirt ridge) around the perimeter to catch water.

#### 5. Post-Plant Care

- **Water Heavily:** Water the newly transplanted rose daily for the first week, especially if it starts to get warmer. Afterward, scale back to deep watering once or twice a week.
- **Avoid Fertilizer:** Do not use granular or salt-heavy fertilizers immediately, as they can burn tender recovering roots. Wait a few weeks until the plant shows signs of new growth.

Bill Jackman, Pianist

May 23, 2026

This essay is posted at

<https://jackmanstatistics.com/commentary.html>

in the **Music** section