

FUCHSIA CULTURE

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Fuchsias, with their large showy flowers, have become popular plants in the past few years. Their biggest demand has been as hanging pots as they bloom profusely during the summer months. Plants can easily be flowered for Mother's Day sales, but the biggest demand is near Memorial Day.

Soil Mix: A 3-2-1 (soil-peat-sand) soil mix can be used. However, a more porous mix such as a 2-1-1 or a 1-1-1 is satisfactory. They also grow well in the peatlite mixes which are ideal for hanging pots. The mix should be adjusted to a pH of 6.0-6.6 with agricultural limestone. Add superphosphate according to a UConn soil test, and procedures outlined in Connecticut Extension Bulletin 72-21, "Greenhouse Crop Nutrition."

Propagation: Many growers use plants left over from spring sales as stock plants. If this is done, use only healthy plants that are free from insects and diseases.

Fuchsias are usually propagated by tip cuttings. They will root in about 3 weeks in sand, sand-peat, perlite or vermiculite. A temperature of 65°F should be maintained. If propagation is done in late summer or early fall, the cuttings should be lightly shaded with cheesecloth.

Cuttings can be taken in September, October and November. After rooting, the cuttings are planted in 2 1/4-3 inch pots. The growing temperature should be 52-55°F.

Light: Fuchsias are classified as long day (short night) plants. That is, they need 12 hours or more of light for flowering. Only four successive long days are needed to induce flower initiation. Lighting from 10 to 2 (with 1.5 watts/sq. ft.) as used on mums, is sufficient. During periods of low light intensity (such as less than 450 fe), no buds will be initiated.

Research at the University of California has found that fuchsias should be pinched at the 4th or 5th node, with the 4th being preferred. Plants should be allowed to develop six nodes, and the top two are then removed.

If plants are propagated early in the season, two or even three pinches may be necessary to keep plants short. However, late propagations will make good plants with a single pinch. For a Mother's Day crop, pinch 8-9 weeks before they are wanted in flower. For Memorial Day, pinch 6-7 weeks before flowers are wanted. (If plants are slow, raise temperature.)

Fertilizer: Fuchsias are heavy feeders, especially in the spring and summer months. Feeding rate is similar to that of mums. Slow release fertilizers can be used especially in hanging pots. They can be supplemented with liquid fertilizers if growth indicates a need.

Hanging Pot Culture: Only trailing varieties should be used in hanging pots. Most growers use two plants per 6 inch pot. For Mother's Day, rooted cuttings can be planted in 4 inch pots until the end of January. Pinch after six pairs of leaves have developed. Plant into 6 inch pots about March 15. Conclusions from University of California research:

1. One single-pinched plant per 5 or 8 inch pan is adequate to produce a well-proportioned pot plant.

2. Stock plants were grown under short-day (SD) conditions of less than 12 hours to prevent flower bud initiation. Plants received the same SD treatment at the time of planting and up to the time they received their first inductive long day (LD).

3. When the plants were pinched one time above the fourth node they were well proportioned.

4. The shoots resulting from the pinch were allowed to grow about four weeks before inducing flowering with long days.

5. Plants were given 12 to 21 LD to induce flower buds and then returned to SD until flowering. This produced a shorter plant than if they were kept under continuous LD. Fewer flowers were produced with the interrupted LD, but with some varieties, the differences were only slight.

6. Plants which were grown under low-light intensity of winter usually did not flower as profusely as those grown under periods of increasing light intensity of spring.

Problems: Fuchsias are susceptible to common greenhouse insects: aphids, white flies and red spiders. Consult your Extension agent for the latest control measures. The major disease problem is Botrytis. Control with benomyl, captan or zineb at recommended rates.