

Are Fuchsias Poisonous?
A Selection of emails on FML via Derek Luther

This was the headline that caught my attention in the Garden News this week (Some time ago!)

A letter written by Mrs. B. Morgan said “Are fuchsias poisonous? We ask because our daughter is an assistant at a children’s nursery. She asked for some spare plants when they were having a talk from a specialist with a view of encouraging the four and five year olds to grow plants for themselves. I gave her some young fuchsias grown from cuttings and some potting compost. The speaker told her to remove them from the hall, as they were very poisonous”.

I have been collecting information on fuchsias for over thirty years and have never come across any reference that they are poisonous. I can remember someone telling me that they threw their fuchsia clippings into their paddock and the animals (can’t remember which type) would not eat them until the leaves had shriveled. This would suggest that the leaves are not very palatable.

I look forward to any comments as I do not want you standing round my grave saying: “he ate the sandwich in the interest of fuchsia science.” Regards...Derek

And here are the various replies:

- The only toxins in fuchsias are those that we add. Berries make mediocre to great jam/jellies. Blossoms and leaves may be crystallized. Watch out for systemic!!!! They accumulate in tissues.
- Some varieties apparently aren’t as flavorful as others—deer will eat one plant to the ground and leave the one next to it alone.
- I have eaten many fruits of fuchsias, but only a few at each time (F. magellanica, F. encliandra) and had no problems but I never try to eat leaves!
- I have recipes from France, England and here in the USA for using fuchsia blossoms, with no mention of being careful of leaves. I have used one cake recipe where the blossoms and small leaves are dipped in egg white and then in sugar for decorations. Again no mention of danger. Most of these recipes are from restaurants.
- This is an important question. We have sold a lot of fuchsia plants to a nursery here that specializes in salad mixes that they sell to restaurants. They are only including the blooms and are growing them without poisonous sprays but there must have been a resource that told them they were safe. People make fuchsia jelly from the fruit also. I’m anxious to learn the facts on this.
- Let’s talk about one thing at a time, fuchsia friends. Fuchsias are edible, not tasty but edible (fuchsia berries are sold in the markets in ‘strawberry boxes’ down in Bolivia and Peru).
- A couple of years ago my herd of some ten sheep found a hole in their fence. A few baskets of fuchsias were extremely tasty; they performed rather a heavy pruning. May I add that none of the culprits showed any sign of bad digestion—thus the hearsay about fuchsias being poisonous must be considered pure slander. Of course there is a difference between what is nutritious to man and to sheep.
- Regarding this ridiculous story of poisonous fuchsias. I have grown these plants for over thirty years, without the slightest problem. I have to be very careful what I grow too, as I have a sensitive skin and am suffering from the skin disease Psoriasis,

so my skin can be very sensitive to allergies. I get a reaction to polyanthus and primroses and have to wear gloves to handle them but never a problem with fuchsias. A little care with the handling of certain plants and washing before eating or handling food, etc, are usually enough to avoid trouble in the garden. After all tales go back many years of fuchsias and apple pie, fuchsia jam and jelly, crystallized fuchsias, etc., etc. That does not say I have tried these things, I prefer to enjoy the lovely flowers! The moral to all this? Use your common sense! Be aware of those plants that are harmful and wash before taking risks.

- In my experience, fuchsia flowers (always from a plant that has not been subjected to systemic poisons or poisonous sprays) are bitter. Try 'Voodoo' or 'Dollar Princess' for example and see for yourself. Of course they make a beautiful garnish and of course endive is also bitter and used all the time in salads so bitterness of itself is not all that out of the way. Any brave souls want to keep tabs on which flowers are the best tasting?

- The conclusion—fruits, etc., are not poisonous unless we have sprayed them but hopefully that is common sense.

From B.C. Fuchsia and Begonia Society The Eardrop of January 2007

From AFS Fuchsia Consultant

An excellent listing of toxic plants is available on the Cornell University website:
<http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/index.html> (Fuchsia is not on this listing.)

For a listing of plants that are good, bad and very bad, Oregon Health & Science University, Oregon Poison Center has this website:
<http://www.ohsu.edu/poison/youAndYourfamily/plantSafety.htm>. Scroll down to "Good Nontoxic Plants" and this listing will include fuchsia.