

## Approaching Season Change By Verna Berger

Fall is quickly approaching, which puts us once again reflecting upon the past Fuchsia growing season. Most of us in the Portland area would agree it has been a challenge from the beginning. Mother Nature basically decided, without any input from us, to plunge us, along with our plants, into the hottest summer on record. Some Fuchsias fared satisfactorily and others failed miserably but none thrived. It definitely was a year of the "survival of the fittest".

According to the Old Farmer's Almanac, our first frost should occur about November 15<sup>th</sup>, while another source predicted October 24<sup>th</sup>. So, depending upon which source you trust, this gives you a little window of time to enjoy your Fuchsias a little longer, should that be your choice.

Fuchsias will usually bloom until the first frost. If you want to keep your plants blooming, continual removal of spent blossoms and seed pods is necessary. If you wish to begin the transition from fall to winter, allow the seed pods to remain on the plant to ripen, signaling the plant to cease blossom production.

If you are planning to take fall cuttings, keep them going a little longer. This will be a good time to watch for the new tip growth that will come with cooler temperatures. If your plant is not a healthy specimen, do not use it for cuttings, as you will likely not get a plant any healthier or stronger than the mother plant from which you take it.

To a degree, fuchsias in containers will recognize seasonal change, but to encourage the necessary hardening off process, begin watering less frequently and change to a fertilizer *low* in nitrogen (which produces new green growth) and higher in phosphorous and potassium, the elements needed to mature stems, roots and leaves. You do not want new growth in November. Reduce your normal fertilization schedule to 1/8 strength every two weeks, and also cut back some on watering, but never let your fuchsias dry out. Fall usually brings with it cooler, more humid temperatures which fuchsias love. Fall also brings out some of the most vibrant colors of the entire growing season.

Keep your 'Inspector's Hat' on, constantly seeking out any signs of pests or disease. Sorry, there is never an end to that chore! Fall usually is accompanied by precipitation, cooler temperatures, and wind, equaling ideal conditions for fungal diseases and rust. Give plants as much air circulation as possible. Those in the landscape are usually very full this time of year and they cannot be moved, so watch them closely. Should you notice any sign of disease, use a fungicide immediately? Keeping the soil clean of debris is an essential deterrent as well. Cooler, humid conditions will usually take care of spider mites, but, alas, there never seems to be anything that naturally eradicates aphids and whitefly short of freezing them to death.

The weather will cool, the rain will fall causing your fuchsias to develop yellowing leaves which the wind will help remove for you, leaving a rather ratty looking plant. Don't despair that's normal behavior for fuchsias in the hardening off process.

Allowing fuchsias to go through a light frost is very healthy for them, forcing the sap back from the growing tips, completing the natural defoliation process. Lack of sap in the growing tips prevents bleeding if your plants require severe pruning prior to placement in their winter storage area.

Fall is also a great time to sit back, admire your fuchsias and reflect on their performance. Are there some that didn't meet your expectations, were difficult to grow in your particular

micro-climate, or simply weren't your favorite for whatever reason? Now is the time to make the decision about whether to winter them over or replace them next spring. Storage space is at a minimum for some and there is no use stressing over where to put those you were not particularly fond of. You may find you are just tired of a particular fuchsias and don't want to winter it over. A great solution would be to give it to a friend or neighbor and let them enjoy it for the remainder of the season and winter it over. In the fuchsia realm, fall is a transitional season for fuchsias and a season of reflection for us, their keepers.

### Fall Care Tips

Continue to inspect for signs of pests or disease.

If and when the rain begins, watch your plants for signs of Rust. Foliage is full this time of year and plants are more crowded than in spring resulting in a little less air circulation.

Keep slugs and snails under control so they don't lay eggs later.

Keep up the regular TLC that our remaining fuchsias require. Don't give up now. Even some of the denuded stems are sprouting new leaves and misting really helps.

Watch weather forecasts for those surprise temperature dips into the 40's. Remember Triphyllas don't like it much below 45 degrees. You may have to bring them in a night or two before winter storage time.

If you notice any unusual colored blossoms on fuchsias or unusual leaf colors or patterns on hostas, take cuttings or isolate sports and try to grow your own new variety. If it holds true for at least 3 successive years, you will be able to register your new variety.

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