

Fuchsias in February By Jackie Downs

This winter during December and January many areas, including the entire state of Oregon, have experienced considerable colder-than-normal weather. You may think that you have lost all or most of your fuchsias if they were unprotected during this freezing weather. They may have had all the tops frozen back, but—don't be in too big of a hurry to discard these plants as dead. Wait and give the plants some time for a comeback. If the roots were not severely frozen they may recover and send up new shoots from the roots. Water the soil only enough to keep it barely moist, give the, if possible, some extra protection and wait. Most fuchsias are heartier than you think!

In the colder areas, it is doubtful that this month will be warm enough to start removing your fuchsias from their winter storage. But, don't forget about checking them occasionally to be sure the soil does not completely dry out. To promote earlier growth, it is possible to bring some into the house, to a warmer location and light. But don't keep them too wet. Don't fertilize until new growth has had a good start. They can be set outdoors on warm, sunny days but should be taken in again by midafternoon. After new foliage is showing it is beneficial to mist the leaves regularly to help counteract the dry warm conditions of the average home. In areas where spring arrives early, most years anyway, fuchsias require very little extra care during the winters months. Many will continue blooming some throughout the entire year. But all fuchsia plants should have a yearly heavy pruning to keep them well shaped. Unpruned plants become very woody with long straggly branches and will mostly bloom just on the end of these unsightly branches. But don't prune until all danger of frost has passed. Once new growth has started should there be a sudden frost, it is this tender new growth that frost will damage. Should this happen, don't prune again until new growth has started once again. Watch your weather reports and thermometers, winter is still not over. Newspapers or plastic sheeting can quickly be applied for a sudden drop of temperature. But remember to remove covering if days are sunny and warm because you don't want to cook the foliage.

Pinching is one of the most important tasks once the new growth has started. Keep your fuchsias well pinched and compact if you desire a good heavy showing of buds and blooms as the growing season progresses. Cuttings can be made from these new tender tips and will root rapidly as the days become longer and warmer.

When **pruning** container plants, it is also a good time to check for rootbound plants. Gently tap the plant out of the container and if rootbound either repot into a large container or prune out the old large roots, leaving the smaller young healthy ones. Then repot in fresh potting mix and water well. Don't water again until really needed.

Fuchsias grown in warm greenhouses should be showing lots of new growth. Keep your plants watered when needed and fertilize regularly. Keep plants healthy by spraying at first sign of any fuchsia pests. Maintain a good circulation of air around them by spreading them out as they continue to grow and fill out. Give them breathing space!

Grow some of your fuchsias to enter in the various fuchsia shows that will be coming along this year. You said there are no fuchsias shows in your area? *Well, then, how about entering some of your plants in the local flower shows and fairs? It can be a lot of fun, a good way to meet other people with the same interests, and often very rewarding too!*

When I first move to Oregon and went to the Josephine County Fair I found that there were no fuchsias entered. So, the next year I entered a few and won ribbons. Since then there are at least a few fuchsias shown every year—keep the interest is growing!

From: The National Fuchsia Society Fuchsia Fan of February 1984