

How Much Water does a Fuchsia Need? By Rodney Bergquist

After serving 21 years in the U.S. Navy it came time for me to retire. Like everyone else that retires, I needed to find a part time job or a hobby to fill my days. I started filling my retirement days by volunteering to help Janis maintain what we consider a big yard with lots of different types of plants. Because I had not worked with garden plants before, I figured the easiest thing I could do to help Janis was take over the three hour job of hand watering the front yard plants, bushes etc. *For me watering plants seemed simple, just stand next to the plant, and **water, water, water**, until the plant was soaked*, then move to the next plant. Of course the job got easier over a period of time as some of the plants decided to die. After several months of helping Janis with yard work chores, I was told I was doing everything wrong, over pruned, over watered, and over fertilized etc. Of course I finally realized if I was going to continue helping with the yard work chores, I would need to learn more about individual plant care. I also decided that if I was going to continue participating in yard work activities, I should find a plant that I really liked and looked forward to seeing it bloom and enjoyed caring for it.

One day while shopping at Home Depot we ventured into the garden center. As we walked around the garden center, Janis was actively checking out all the seasonal plants that she might want to replace or add to the front yard. I just wandered around, amazed at all the wonderful colored flowers Mother Nature makes available for us to enjoy. As I wandered around I started looking at the fuchsia hanging baskets which caught my eye. On the stand below the hanging baskets was a little fuchsia in a four inch pot, named Display. I took a liking to its beautiful flower and decided I would take Display home to see if I could grow it. After I got home, I realized I knew nothing about how to care for a fuchsia except to water it.

So now I started out my journey to learn how to care for my first fuchsia. As luck would have it, I noticed in the Vallejo Times Herald, community section of the paper was a notice that the Vallejo Branch of the American Fuchsia Society was meeting, the next Tuesday, at 7:30,

So I decided to attend the meeting and see if I could get some information on how to care for my new fuchsia.

To make a long story short, **this is what happened at my first Vallejo Branch fuchsia meeting**. Whoever was supposed to show up to do the program, did not show, however a guest showed up that everyone referred to as Barney or Barney Gonzales. After a lot of greetings and general socializing the meeting got started. Then came time for the program and the person responsible for having a program looked at Barney and asked, Barney would you be willing to answer fuchsia questions to fill in for our program?

I found out later that Barney loved to talk and teach fuchsia culture. Barney got up in front of the group and asked, does anyone have a fuchsia question? I eagerly raised my hand and asked, **how much water does a fuchsia need?** Keep in mind, I am a retired sailor who has been riding around on ships and submarines for 20 years, so I'm thinking a simple answer like, my fuchsia might need a cup of water, or a half a cup of water once a week. **Barney said, how much water does your fuchsia need, depends on how you answer these questions**. He walked over the black board so he could write down the things discussed.

First question: **What is the climate like where you live** is the temperature below 75 degrees or 75-100 + degrees?

Where are we growing this fuchsia? In San Francisco Bay Area where it's cool and temperature normally do not exceed 70 degrees, where fuchsias do exceptionally well. Or are we talking about growing fuchsias in Sacramento's hot summer temperatures which are normally 90-100+ degrees in the summer? Fuchsias grown in hot climates like Sacramento will require extra water and protection from the hot afternoon sun.

What time of year are you referring to, spring when plants are in full growth mode, or summer when plants are in full bloom, needing to be watered often? In the fall when it becomes cooler, water doesn't evaporate from the pots and plants need less water.

What type of containers are you using, plastic containers which don't absorb water or clay and wood pots which may absorb some water from the soil?

What type of potting mix are you using, one that is real light like Super Soil that is fast draining, or one that holds a moderate amount of water? The one you might choose to use may depend on your current work status. For retired folks a light fast draining potting mix usually works best for fuchsias but will need to be watered more often. A potting mix that holds a moderate amount of water might be more suited for people who have to go work every day.

Is your fuchsia planted in the ground, or grown in a container? Fuchsias planted in the ground usually get watered once a week but a fuchsia in a container may need to be watered twice a day, depending on where you live and time of year.

Where are you keeping your plant, somewhere that gets morning sun, under shade cloth, under a tree getting filtered sun or in a cool shaded area?

Is your plant a vigorous growing plant or a slow growing plant? Vigorous growing plants need a lot more water than a fragile slow growing plant.

Last but not least, windy days and days with **low humidity** will suck the moisture out of the air, plants leaves & potting mix, which will require you to water more often. **An hour later**, after explaining how each of the items listed on the board might affect watering fuchsias, *Barney asked, have I answered your question?* He said, you must consider all of the above options in order to understand, how much water an individual fuchsia needs.

What did I learn from this experience? I realized there is no one size fits all or simple answer to how much water does an individual fuchsia need. That's probably why watering is the most difficult thing for fuchsia growers to master. Each plant is different, the climate you live in and time of year, will probably dictate how much water your fuchsia needs and how often you need to water it. I also learned that experienced fuchsia growers hang out at American Fuchsia Society branch meetings and they enjoy teaching people how they grow beautiful fuchsias in their local area.