

The History of the Genus
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In spite of the increased variety of plants made available by a blooming house plant industry the fuchsia still ranks amongst those more commonly seen plants in cottage, house and flat windows. This is of course a reflection on the ease of cultivation and amount of abuse that fuchsias will suffer whilst giving some sort of floral display.

Fuchsias of some sort or another have been popular for at least a hundred years so they can hardly be termed a modern craze. Since the early years of this century they have been steadily increasing in popularity and at least two societies of international standing have been founded to cater for enthusiasts. It is not known exactly when the first fuchsias species was introduced, but it seems certain that two species, *F. magellanica* and *F. coccinea* were in cultivation in this country by the 1790s. *Fuchsia coccinea* seems to have been the very first to be cultivated. It is the subject of a story told against a Mrs. James Lee, well-known London nurseryman and plants man of the period who, it was said, heard of a strange and beautiful plant growing in the window of a sailors' home. After considerable discussion with the owner and a lure of money Lee obtained possession of this prize and was soon building up a stock of young plants what sold at great profit. It is now generally agreed, however, that Lee obtained this fuchsias in a highly suspicious fashion through the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and put out the above story as a cover-up. This story does vaguely reflect the true origins of *F. coccinea*, which almost certainly was brought to this country from Brazil to a Capt. Firth during 1788 and species that were to play any part in the modern hybrids were introduced. They are: *F. lycoides* (1796), *F. arborescens* (1824), *F. microphylla* (1827), *F. fulgens* (1840), and *F. apetala*, *F. decussate*, *F. dependens* and *F. denticulata* (*F. serratifolia*), all in 1843. Garden varieties like 'Rose of Castile' are primarily descended from only two of these, *F. magellanica* and *F. fulgens*, although *F. denticulata* and *F. boliviana*—introduced later—have been used by hybridists.

The genus *Fuchsia* was founded by Pere Plumier in 1703 when he named *F. coccinea* to honor Leonhart Fuchs, a notable physician and herbalist of his times (1501-66). Later, Linnaeus (Carl von Linne) took up this name when compiling his *Gerarum Plantarum* (1737). Being named to honour a Dr. Fuchs raises the interesting but doubles pedantic point that we should pronounce fuchsias as "fooksia". However, having tried this approach and noted the raised eyebrow and curious glance I feel reasonable certain that the common usage of more than a century of "fuchsia" will prevail.

In 1943 the first really comprehensive treatise on the genus was published. It was called *A Revision of the Genus Fuchsia*, by Dr. P. A. Munz. Dr. Munz is an American taxonomist of some note. In this monograph approximately 100 species are listed. Of these, less than half have ever been introduced from the wild as living material and little more than a quarter are now known in cultivation.

Approximately 90 per cent of all known fuchsia species come from the American continent, ranging from Mexico in the north to Chile in the south and including some of the West Indies, notably Cuba, Trinidad and Haiti. The remainder hail from countries as far away as New Zealand and Tahiti. A wide range of growth form is found in the genus fuchsia, from the small carpeting species like *F. procumbens* to trees of 30 to 40 ft. like *F. excorticata*. Most of them are shrubs on various sizes. Some of these bear tubers rather like those of a

dahlia and are often epiphytic on rocks and trees. Some are deciduous or semi-deciduous, others are evergreen. Fuchsias were originally placed in the family *Oenotheraceae*. More recently, some taxonomists feel that the genus fuchsia is sufficiently unique to merit a family of its own, the *Fuchsiaeae*. At present however, *Oenotheraceae* is still the accepted name to those uninitiated in taxonomic matters.

Right from the beginning, fuchsia species were hybridized and over the years some interesting cultivars produced. Very few of these remain today. A notable exception to this is the race of *F. triphylla* hybrids raised in Germany towards the end of the nineteenth century and typified by such cultivars as 'Gartermeister Bonstedt' and 'Thalia', not infrequently seen in the parks and gardens of today. It was not until *F. magellanica* and its forms was crossed with *F. fulgens* that the modern race of garden fuchsias can be said to have arrived. For a while British hybridists held the field; they were then closely followed by the French, Belgians and Germans in that order in the 1920s the Americans, particularly a handful of enthusiasts in California, where of course growing conditions for these plants is ideal, started breeding work and quite soon took the lead. Today, most, but not all, of the new cultivars come from there.

As I have already suggested, ease is one of the contributing factors to the popularity of cultivation. This is not to say of course that they thrive on neglect: quite the reverse in fact. To get the very best plants reasonably rich compost is required, say a John Innes NO.2 or even No. 3 type compost. I say "type compost" advisably, because outside of the John Innes Institute a good J. I. compost is a rare commodity. Whatever type of compost is used it must be retentive of moisture yet well aerated. This applies to both pot and border cultivation.

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