

Gall Mite Control Starts with Pruning

By Rodney Bergquist

Because my program presentation at the 2010 Oregon Fuchsia Convention seemed to be well received, I thought I should try to share some of the program information in an article with members who were not able to attend the convention

Growing fuchsias in California is not doom & gloom. Initially the American Fuchsia Society (AFS) probably over reacted to the fuchsia gall mite problem causing our own fears. Now that we have accepted the fact that gall mites are not going away, for various reasons, we have moved on to a more practical, common sense approach to controlling the amount of plant damage, the gall mites can cause. Janis & I visited several members' gardens this past year and not once did we see any gall mite plant blemishes. Many of our members have turned a visual negative into a visual positive, by cutting off the developing galls as they occur, before they become a problem.

We need to stop promoting our own bad press. The pictures we have all seen of ugly gall mite plant damage represent the extreme, uncared for fuchsias, and are not the norm. Bad news like fuchsia gall mites only remains to be bad news, if people fail to respond to the problem.

We need to see the bigger picture. If fuchsia societies cannot offer the general public, a gall mite control method that is, simple, easy to apply and reasonably effective, we cannot realistically expect to gain new members.

We need to soften our fuchsia gall mite terminology. We need to reduce the importance of fuchsia gall mite plant damage to significant nuisance that can be controlled when performing routine plant maintenance. Instead of saying, watch out for the horrible gall mites, we could say, "keep an eye out for the gall mite plant blemishes or gall mite new construction sites and remove them (cut them off, as soon as possible)".

EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER:

You will not normally see any gall mite plant blemishes in our yard. Why is that? It's because Janis & I understand the need to be pro-active gardeners. We remove all newly developing galls during the initial development stage, before they become a problem.

What are galls? We all know what a normal leaf or a normal flower bud looks like. Galls are SWOLLEN abnormal disfigured plant growth, normally on a leaf, leaf stem or bud. The gall area will be swollen, may look hairy and sometimes looks reddish in color.

When do the galls become a problem? The galls contain newly hatched baby gall mites which are feeding on the plant tissue inside the developing galls. If you leave the galls on the plant, the baby gall mites will mature, become adults, leave the gall, and move to different branches, lay more eggs, which will create more galls. The simplest thing we can do to help ourselves control gall mites, is remove the developing galls.

The galls can easily be removed (cut off) in about the same amount of time it takes to dead head an old rose flower. When you remove the developing galls, you are removing future generations of gall mites and future generations of gall mite plant damage.

Gall Mite Control starts with pruning: The overall objective of common sense gall mite control is focusing on reducing the number of gall mites living on our fuchsias. Fewer gall mites living on your plant will create fewer galls. I recommend you consider using the following steps to reduce the number of gall mites living on your fuchsias. These steps were

originally recommended to me by Peter Baye, several years ago, and have been written in previous bulletin articles. If you want to significantly reduce the number of gall mites on your fuchsias, do the following;

When it's time to prune: Prune the plant back as far as you dare. Remove all leaves, flowers, buds and loose bark. Thoroughly spray the plant with horticultural oil, at winter strength. The oil will smother the adult gall mites that are trying to winter over, and will also cover most of the eggs that have been laid, which are also trying to winter over.

Summer maintenance: is also an important part of controlling fuchsia gall mites. In our yard, Janis & I have two very large fuchsias. One is named 'Cardinal' and the other is named, *F. magallancia*. Both fuchsias have been in our landscape for over 40 years. Both fuchsias get various amounts of gall mite plant blemishes 3 to 5 times as year. How do I maintain these fuchsias? **I play hide and seek with the gall mites**, they hide and I seek to find them. Every 7 to 10 days, Janis & I check all our fuchsias for newly developing galls. When I find a new gall mite construction site, I say, "There you are". Then I explain to the gall mites, that I have a lot of friends that do not like gall mites, so I am going to move your newly constructed housing to a new location, where you and your family will readily be accepted. It's called the "Trash Bin Housing Area". Then I cut off the gall, one node below the plant blemish and move them to our trash bin location.

IMPORTANT: After 10 years of maintaining these two landscape fuchsias, I finally realized that I had been controlling the amount of gall mite plant damage on these two fuchsias by simply removing the developing galls, before they became a problem. **I did not let them multiply.**

After removing the developing galls, continue to reduce the number of gall mites on you plant by thoroughly spraying the plants foliage with a non-toxic solution of 70% Isopropyl Rubbing Alcohol. I use a quart container, put one cup of the 70% Isopropyl Rubbing Alcohol into the quart container, then add a few drops of liquid soap as a sticking agent, then I fill the rest of the quart container with water, mix and apply with a spray bottle.

HIGH MAINTENANCE FUCHSIAS: I had a new idea while putting together my convention program that might be worth considering. Maybe we need to **simplify or broaden** the gall mite resistant identification process. Because we cannot see fuchsia gall mites, it's difficult for growers to verify that a fuchsia actually has live gall mites on it, so you cannot be sure the plant is actually gall mite resistant. Maybe a more practical approach might be; for us to spend our time and effort identifying **HIGH MAINTENANCE FUCHSIAS**. Most of us, even new members, with very little fuchsia experience would be able to identify really bad, uncontrollable amounts of plant damage. Those fuchsias could be put on a high maintenance list, and would not be recommended to new members, but would still be available to experienced growers who are willing to put forth the additional effort required to maintain these plants.

In summary: I spent about three years being obsessed with eliminating all the gall mites on my fuchsias using various extreme control methods. One day when Peter Baye was visiting, I told him that all my extreme control efforts had not eliminated all the gall mites on my fuchsias, and that I was frustrated and discouraged. He said, "You are trying too hard to kill all the gall mites on your fuchsias, because in the end, it does not matter. He said, even if I was lucky enough to kill all the gall mites on all my fuchsias today, tomorrow the neighborhood hummingbird who has been visiting uncared for fuchsias in the wild, or the uncared for fuchsias of the neighborhood, will visit my yard and possible bring in a new

generation of gall mites. Or, I will go somewhere and buy a new fuchsia, which also has the possibility of bringing in a new generation of gall mites”.

He also said; “Up to this point, most of us have only considered how horrible the gall mite plant damage can become. However, it does not have to be all ugly or no gall mite plant damage at all. As a fuchsia society, we need to be somewhere in between, ugly and none. I am constantly reminded of that, as I do routine plant maintenance, when I see mild to moderate amounts of plant damage caused by cutter bees, aphids, spider mites, rust, torn leaves, sun burnt leaves, broken branches and a few gall mite plant blemishes, all of which are a part of nature’s normal plant life cycle.

2011 Vision: We are today’s generation of fuchsia pioneers. How people view fuchsias in the next twenty five years will largely be dependent on our current attitude towards controlling fuchsia gall mites. The new phrases I am hearing lately like, this fuchsia and that fuchsia are **almost** mite resistant. The plant that this cutting is from gets a little gall mite damage but the fuchsia flowers are really beautiful, and the plant is worth maintaining. **If we hope to return fuchsias to popularity, we need to be able to tell other fuchsia growers and the general public with confidence; this is how I control the fuchsia gall mites in our yard. I cut off the developing fuchsia galls before they become a problem.** When you remove the developing galls, you are removing future generations of gall mites and future generations of gall mite plant damage. I am looking forward to another enjoyable year of growing fuchsias and spending time with you.

Other references: Peter Baye article: Learning to Live with Fuchsia Gall Mites in our July-September 2009 AFS Bulletin. Rodney Bergquist article: My New 2010 F.G.M. Perspective in our January-March 2010 AFS Bulletin.