

FOR BEGINNERS ONLY
Start Easy & Grow with Pleasure
By Chuck Hassett

If you have never grown fuchsias let me say that once you have seen them in all their glory, in a well-kept garden or a beautifully staged fuchsia show, you will be charged with enthusiasm. You will be in danger of becoming a compulsive collector who will want a cutting of every variety you see. Mary and I have had that experience and would like to give some advice to those who might be bitten by the same bug this summer for the first time.

First, begin in a comfortably small way. Choose a few basket varieties or bedding fuchsias at your local nursery, really enjoy their beauty and become familiar with their growing habits and cultural needs before trying to propagate them yourself. Remember, five plants can be exciting and give real pleasure. Fifty plants are also very beautiful if you have space for them, but they require ten times the labor that five plants do.

When you purchase plants be selective. Choose specimens that are healthy, and varieties that have good growth habits. See that there is good growth on all sides of the plant. Buy early in the season, when new plants are first set out on the nursery shelves, and you'll have your pick of the best ones. If you buy blooming plants, look for new growth and buds so you will have continual bloom.

Avoid plants on which the leaves are curled, deformed, and discolored. It might be diseased or infested. Whiteflies, mites, aphids, and fuchsia rust are not as easy to get rid of as one would like, and there is the danger of spreading a problem among your other plants. It's worth paying a little more, to buy from a nursery which has a good reputation for high-quality plants.

Never accept an unlabeled plant unless you happen to know it by its blossoms. It is more interesting and rewarding to grow plants that you know by name. Visitors will surely ask about its name if they admire the fuchsia; you'll see a look of disappointment when you don't have the answer. Furthermore, it's difficult to get growing advice or a replacement for a plant without naming the variety, and eventually you will want to have correct labels so you can enter your plants in a show.

Whenever possible, you can double your pleasure by attending meetings of a local fuchsia society. There you will meet people with a common interest, generous people who will be happy to exchange plants and ideas with you. Ask questions, about potting soil, fertilizer, watering procedures, pest control, temperature, humidity, light, ventilation, and recommended varieties. The experienced growers will be flattered that you want to benefit from their knowledge. Weigh all of the advice you receive and try the suggestions that best fit your own garden situation. After a year of enjoying your own fuchsia plants, seeing them thrive and bloom under your own care, you may want to try propagating some from cuttings. Get detailed rooting instructions at society meetings and in fuchsia culture books and bulletin articles.

Then experiment with different ways of displaying fuchsias, in containers as well as in landscaping schemes. Tree fuchsias (standards) are challenging to grow and

beautiful to see, or try to espalier a scandent fuchsia against a fence or building.
Train some small, flowered fuchsias in bonsai or topiary forms.
Fuchsias are beautiful and fun to grow, especially when you can balance your plants
with your time, space, preferences, and personal energy.

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