

**Summer in Sacramento**  
**Fuchsia Care for Fuchsias in the Sacramento Area**  
**By Scott Humphrey, Sacramento Branch AFS**

All aspects of plant care are individualized and should not be presented in a way that suggests there is only one way to grow a healthy plant. It depends on soils, typical and unusual temperatures of a specific microclimate, sun light and influences each yard may have and other factors and influences.

This being said, the following is what Scott Humphrey does for fuchsia care during summer months in the Sacramento area and other growers will have different ideas or experiences. Gather information yourself, experiment and develop what works for you and your yard. Generally speaking, fuchsias prefer to be on the moist side but as with many plants, they do not want to sit in water which can cause rotting of roots. Depending on your microclimate, you might want to water frequently but have a well-draining soil mixture. In dryer areas (unless you've created a differing microclimate with neighboring plant materials, watering, etc.) you might want a soil mixture which retains water (a mixture having organic material as a primary material vs. a sandy composite found in well-draining soils).

**Watering:** I water in mid-morning and this is much easier in recent years with a sprinkler system because I rarely have time in the morning to water and get out the door before 6:30 a.m. Some people water at sunrise for good water pressure but I have good water pressure and I take advantage of natural moisture which tends to be on plants in the morning hours, even in our summer months. I water every other day (at about 9:00 a.m.) for about ten minutes. During hot spells, I'll run the system in the evening in addition to what was done in the morning. I do this after the direct sun has gone down so not to burn the foliage and by this time the stomata on plants are open again for accepting water. I try not to water after dark because in the warm weather this can eventually lead to good conditions for fungi growth.

Potted plants are nice in that you can position them when they are putting on a good show. You can view the plants from indoors, from patios or from any sitting area in the yard. Potted plants require more work in all months. In the winter, you'll want to make sure the water reservoir is not holding water for extended periods of time. Sitting water can lead to saturation of the roots and provide a breeding ground for mosquitos. Potted plants also have reduced area to hold water and retain fertilizer. For this reason, you'll need to remember to develop a fertilizing schedule for your fuchsias and probably water such plants daily during the summer or warm months. Hanging plants (and especially wood containers) dry out easily so if you aren't around during the day you might want to set the hanger on the ground under a tree or cool area. Patios can have shade but if they have direct sun during the late morning or later times of the day, they can generate a lot of heat and dry plants out- stress them even if well-watered.

**Sunlight:** During the spring, fall and winter months I place potted fuchsias in sunny areas that I can see from the indoors or patio. I might not be in the yard as much during wet weather but I might be able to view the fuchsias in areas I can place containers. Depending on the variety, you can see fuchsias in bloom for most of the year and during the wet periods of the year, many fuchsias will have better color and flower production with more direct sunlight.

Specific to Sacramento summers, I move my “shade loving” plants to more protected areas. As with azaleas, camellias and the like, the foliage will be healthier and you’ll have better flower production if such plants get a good deal of morning (before 11:30 a.m.) sunlight. This can be indirect, filtered or even full sunlight BUT will need to be well filtered or given shade during the warm part of the day.

**Fertilizer:** There are many ideas on fertilizing and as with each microclimate, it can differ and be successful with each idea. I tend to use the general variety of Miracle-gro. It has a higher middle number (phosphorus) which give the ratio of influence towards root & flower growth. Depending on all of your plant needs, you might select a certain fertilizer which emphasizes certain ingredients and needs. For example:

- Nitrogen (first major fertilizer ingredient) will promote and green up foliage
- Phosphorus (second major fertilizer ingredient) will promote root and flower growth
- Potassium (third major fertilizer ingredient) is known to give the plant overall strength and might be considered a “helper” to the other fertilizer ingredients. The last I heard, it was not known what specific areas of the plant benefitted so I don’t know of any fertilizer that will devote any ratio towards the potassium content.

Many people will cut back or stop fertilizing during the winter months because the temperature and plant patterns of growth will not make use of the fertilizer. Fertilizer is usually increased as things warm up- depending on the year but usually around early March. Personally, I TRY to use the proper mixture of Miracle-gro every two weeks to give good foliage color and blossom production. I slow down on my fertilizing during the hottest spells of summer because I think many plants (there are exceptions of course) slow down- maybe to conserve energy and especially in climates that do not resemble their native conditions (moist areas with filtered sunlight).

We’ll ask others what/how they use fertilizer. Some people might start their spring fertilizing with a fast acting fertilizer (in liquid format usually) but use a granular or fertilizer with weaker fertilizer content.

**Pruning:** A majority of fuchsia pruning will be done in early spring. I tend to keep the plants clean throughout the summer. The spring pruning provides good material for cuttings and encourages new plant growth which generally produces a new supply of blossoms (depending on the fuchsia variety of course). I will prune in the summer if there is physical damage that I’m cleaning up or to correct or encourage certain plant growth. It is more of a challenge and the success rate of plant cuttings will likely be reduced during hot spells of the summer but you might as well do cuttings because anything that roots is better than just tossing the cuttings material. You’ll want to make sure cuttings are watered (again, don’t have them sit for long periods of time in water) and do not get much direct sunlight (except for early morning light) because they do not have the root system to handle stress or foliage (since you’ve removed most of the leaves) to capture moisture or produce internal hydrology or system plumbing.