

Caring for Your Fuchsia

Smaller fuchsia plants. Resist the temptation to plant your 2" or 4" fuchsia plant in a large basket or pot. When planted in too large a pot, the region of soil surrounding the root ball will tend to remain too wet, promoting the growth of molds. Smaller fuchsia plants can be grown to larger size by stepwise potting the plant into larger containers. Once the roots reach the inside wall of the pot, the plant can be moved into a slightly larger pot—one that provides no more than an inch or so of space around the root ball. A common sequence is 2" → 4" → gallon pots → basket or 2 gallon pot.

Soil. Fuchsia soil should drain readily. You can use potting soil with pumice or perlite added in a 75%-25% ratio

Watering is the single most critical aspect of fuchsia care. Fuchsias need damp soil but continuously wet soil will prevent air from reaching the roots and encourage the growth of molds and other organisms. When watering, soak the soil then wait for the top 1" of soil to become dry to the touch (Stick your finger down into the soil!) before watering again. If the soil is damp at the depth of 1" your plant should not be watered!



Pinching produces bushier plants. A fuchsia branch will have leaf nodes out of which 2 leaves (sometimes 3 or 4) grow. The single branch will continue to grow beyond a node. But if you cut off (or pinch off) that single branch just beyond a leaf node, 2 (or 3 or 4) branches will sprout at those nodes. Then a 2" plant with 4 branches will become a plant with 8, then 16, ... branches. For hanging baskets, you would typically pinch at every node unless the nodes are less than 1" apart. For upright plants, you can pinch at every node to make a bushier plant or every 2 or 3 nodes for a taller plant.

About 6 weeks (for plants with single flowers) or 8 weeks (double flowers) before you want open flowers, you should stop pinching and let the branches grow.

Fertilizing is necessary to produce a nice plant and flowers. Early in the year when you're trying to produce green growth, i.e., a bigger plant, a high-nitrogen fertilizer is best. Fertilizers are characterized by 3 numbers as N-P-K. N represents the amount of nitrogen; P, phosphorous; and K, potassium. A high nitrogen fertilizer is one with the first number larger than the other two, e.g., 30-10-10.

When you stop pinching, switch to a balanced fertilizer—one with all 3 numbers roughly equal, e.g., 12-12-12.

Apply fertilizers according to the manufacturer's directions. You can save time by using time release fertilizers.

Locate your fuchsia where it will get morning sun or dappled shade during the day. Fuchsias need some sunlight to bloom.

Dealing with hot weather. Do what you can to cool the area around the plant. You can spray the pavement, keep the plant in full shade, put the plant on the ground, and mist it. If the plant has damp soil, do not water it, even if it wilts. Fuchsias like temperatures about 70°F.

Pests

White fly and aphids. Spray off with a jet of water. Insecticidal soap. Malathion.

Rust. Spots that look like powdered mustard typically found on the bottom side of leaves and spreads rapidly in damp conditions. Gently pick off infested leaves trying to not touch clean leaves. Try to maintain dryer conditions with more air flow. Fertilize plant with high nitrogen to help regrow foliage.

Fuchsia mite. Causes new growth to become gnarled, often reddish and slightly fuzzy. Cut off all gnarled branches 2 nodes below the infested area, then spray with liquid Sevin. Repeat this procedure every 3-4 days for 3 sprayings. Thoroughly wet the entire plant. The microscopic mite can be transported between plants by the gardener, the wind, insects, and hummingbirds.

Orange County Fuchsia Society
<http://www.ocfuchsiasociety.com/>