

Cape Fuchsia

Botanical Name: *Phygelius* (fy-GEL-us)

Phygelius (cape fuchsia) have tubular blossoms similar to those of the hardy fuchsias (*Fuchsia* species). Its name is thought to be from the Greek phyge as in "flight" or "avoidance".

Last spring a friend gave me two plants that needed a new home. I was unfamiliar with the plants and had no information as to their name or their growing requirements. To my surprise they grew rapidly and produced beautiful fuchsia like blooms all summer and late into the fall. Their lovely chartreuse leaves were still in evidence after a hard frost!

Upon investigation the cape fuchsia is even more fascinating, though the common name is misleading. Botanically the cape fuchsia is unrelated to the hardy fuchsia. *Phygelius* is native to South Africa and belongs to the *Scrophulariaceae* (Snapdragon family).



These ornamental plants are generally treated as tender perennials in cooler climates. However, in USDA Zone 7 and warmer, they are hardy to 0 degrees and can remain evergreen to 20 degrees. If winter is particularly cold the plant's stems may die back to the ground. But given a sheltered site and favorable weather conditions, the cape fuchsia will grow three to five feet in height and remain evergreen.

A Cape fuchsia will grow best in well drained soil in full sun. They can take shade, but too much shade and they become leggy. Although the cape fuchsia is drought tolerant, regular watering during the dry season is necessary. Keep the soil moist but avoid excess water.

Typically the individual flowers are about two inches long and shaped like a dangling tubular trumpet with a slightly flared mouth. The flowers are downward facing and grow in clusters on eight to ten inch long spikes. The leaves are lance-shaped, giving the plant an attractive appearance before and after flowering.

These versatile plants have two wild species, *Phygelius capensis* and *Phygelius aequalis*. The main difference is that the *P. capensis* has flowers that are evenly spaced and the *P. aequalis* has flowers hanging to one side. Both species have forms with yellow flowers and red interiors.

There are about 15 cultivars in various hues of red, yellow, peach, pink and magenta. The hybrid cultivars of these two species are listed as forms of *Phygelius x rectus*.

Wild Phygelius

Phygelius capensis red flowers, yellow throats

Phygelius aequalis coral-red flowers, yellow throats, mahogany rims

- *P. aequalis* 'Yellow Trumpet' pale yellow flowers
- *P. aequalis* 'Trewidden Pink' dusty pink flowers
- *P. aequalis* 'Pink Trumpet' salmon-pink flowers, yellow throats

Phygelius x rectus cross between *P. capensis* and *P. aequalis*

- 'Devil's Tears' bright red flowers, yellow throats
- 'African Queen' deep salmon flowers, yellow throats
- 'Salmon Leap' pale apricot flowers
- 'Winchester Fanfare' flowers blend pink, red & orange
- 'Moonraker' pale yellow flowers
- 'Sunburst/Sunshine' pink flowers, chartreuse leaves
- 'New/Pink Sensation' magenta-pink, flowers
- 'Pink Elf' coral-pink

Cape fuchsias spread by sending out underground suckers. They are easily propagated by digging up its running suckers and replanting them in fertile soil. Cape fuchsias seeds can be collected. When the seed capsules turn brown, crack them open. Save them in a paper bag and keep them warm and dry. When completely dry, move the seeds to a cool dry place for storage. Sow seeds outdoors in spring, or start them earlier inside.

During the winter many perennials completely disappear leaving gaps in beds and borders that are prime for weed infiltration. Cape fuchsia's year around bulk can keep out weeds. This feature, added to their extraordinarily long flowering season and their abundant showy flowers in eye-catching colors, makes them choice plants.

Plant them in borders with *Salvia* and hardy *Fuchsias* and the glorious pinks and reds will draw the hummingbirds like magnets.

References

Ashmum, Barbara B. (2003). [Cape Fuchsia \(*Phygelius* species\)-Perennials With Punch](#). *Plants & Garden News*, Volume 18 Number 2. Retrieved January 22, 2007.

[Plant Profiles: Phygelius](#). Retrieved January 23, 2007.

Moyer, Matt & Schoellhorn, Rick. (2004). [Phygelius Possibilities](#). *Greenhouse Product News*, Volume 14 Number 8. Retrieved February 6, 2007.