

Fuchsia

It wouldn't be summer without the beautiful hanging baskets of fuchsias decorating front porches in the neighborhoods. These dainty drops of ballerina blossoms enchant us with their profusion from summer into fall. But fuchsias can be tricky we are told – and are there really hardy ones that can be planted in the ground here? Don't they die if it gets cold? What do I need to know to keep my hanging basket looking good? What varieties are there, and where do they come from? Can I propagate or overwinter the ones I like? These questions and more are examined here for you.

A little history – Fuchsia is both the common and the Latin genus name for a group of about 110 species that are found in the wild in Central and South America. The genus was named in 1703 by Father Charles Plumier in honor of a German botanist of the 16th century named Leonard Fuchs. The pronunciation of the genus in English usage is "fyew'sha", or alternatively "fyewk'see-ah" – somewhat truer to the pronunciation of Fuchs. The native habitat of most Fuchsia species is cool, damp, densely forested areas of the Andes, although most of the cultivars we see today are hybrids of three species: *F. magellanica*, *F. coccinea*, and *F. fulgens*. In the 1830's, in the peace following the Napoleonic wars, breeding and hybridizing began in Britain and France. After the two world wars in the 20th century, American breeders began to enter the hybridization business. There are an amazing variety of colors and forms, and each year new fuchsia hybrids are introduced to add to the over 8000 varieties available to dazzle us with their loveliness.



A little terminology – Fuchsias are often described in the garden center by their colors and form. It is helpful to know some terminology so you know what is being described!

Fuchsia flowers are tubular and often hanging. The outer tube, ending in the swept back sepals of the flower, is called the calyx. The inner bell of petals is called the **corolla**. The corolla can be **single**, **semi double**, or **double**, depending on the number of petals. Single flowers have four petals, semi double have between five and seven,

and double have eight or more. The fuchsia cultivars called **Triphyllas**, bred from the species *F. triphylla*, have long-tubed flowers with trumpet shaped sepals and petals.

Fuchsia forms can be **trailing**, **bush** or **vines**. Trailing fuchsias have lax, cascading stems that look wonderful in a hanging basket. Bush fuchsias have upright growth that can be used in a container or planted out in a garden. Bush and trailing fuchsias can also be trained into **standards**, with a long bare stem surmounted by foliage and flowers. The vine fuchsias are new on the market, and can be planted out in the garden to grow on a trellis or porch.

Hardiness of fuchsias varies, depending on the original species hardiness. "**Hardy**" means the plant survives over winter in the ground, even in freezing temperatures. *F. magellanica* and its hybrids are the hardiest, surviving winters to USDA zone 6 (or 23° F) if mulched or given some protection. "**Half-hardy**" fuchsias are marginally hardy, with the top growth dying back to the ground in winter, but sending up new shoots in the spring, similar to other perennial plants. "**Tender**" fuchsias will not survive below freezing temperatures. See below for overwintering potential.

Growing Hardy and Half-Hardy Fuchsias in the Garden

Hardy and half-hardy fuchsias can be used in the garden as background plants, blooming from summer until the first fall freeze. Some grow to 5 feet and can be used as mass plantings or hedges. Fuchsias are known as shade garden plants, but according to Ron Monnier of Monnier's Country Gardens, LLC, when planted in the ground, full sun is not a problem in our climate, and flowering is more profuse if given at least part sun. Much more important is drainage. According to Mr. Monnier, "more fuchsias are lost to wet feet than cold". When planting a fuchsia, plant it deep, like a tomato, so that the crown is 4–6 inches below the soil surface, or half the plant height of a smaller plant. This will allow more roots to grow to support the plant and protect the plant from freezing in the winter. According to Monnier, ¼ cup of all purpose fertilizer (16-16-16) and 1 cup of organic matter (compost or alfalfa pellets) should be added to the hole and backfill when planting. Thoroughly water after planting, regularly during the first season and when dry thereafter. Fuchsias flower on the current season's growth. Removing flowers as they fade will help keep your plant flowering instead of putting energy into seeds. Remove any diseased leaves that may fall and contaminate the soil. Fuchsias like to be fertilized with balanced fertilizers, like 20-20-20, to keep them flowering. A mulch of organic matter in the fall will protect your plant from freezing. Late in the dormant winter period cut the plants back to about 6 inches or ½ of the previous years growth. Remove the mulch when the new growth appears in the spring. Be patient - some are slow starters, but will reward you in later summer and fall!

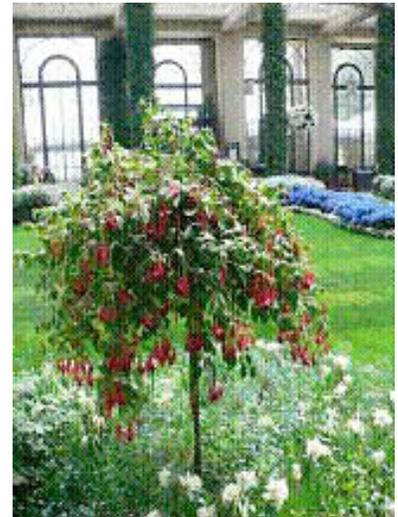
Growing Fuchsias in Pots

Many nurseries carry fuchsia starts in the spring, as well as beautiful hanging baskets and standards. If you want to create your own hanging basket, choose trailing fuchsia starts that are already well branched. If you want to train a fuchsia standard, choose a start that has a long, unbranched stem, either trailing or upright. Pot in a good potting soil in a container with very good drainage. Fuchsias in pots require more shade than those in the ground, but morning sun is fine. The soil must be kept moist but not soggy, and feeding once a week with a balanced fertilizer, such as 20-20-20 (1 Tbsp per gallon of water), is recommended by the Oregon Fuchsia Society. If you prefer to fertilize each time you water, use ¼ strength fertilizer.

To create a hanging basket, position 3 to 5 starts in your pot about halfway between the center and the edge of the pot. This allows for air circulation, which is very important. Water thoroughly after planting. To get a full, trailing basket, pinch the plant to encourage branching. Beginning at soil level, count up the stem to three sets of leaves. Pinch or cut out the next set of leaves. Two new shoots will grow from this point. When these two shoots have grown to another 2 sets of leaves, cut the next set that begins to grow. Repeat this process once more, then allow the plants to grow out. It will take about 6 weeks from the last pinching until the first blossoms appear on single fuchsias, 8 weeks for doubles. Removing spent flowers by pinching them off at the base of the stem will prevent the plant from putting energy into seeds and will keep it flowering flowering. From mid-summer until cold weather in fall, you should have beautiful blossoms.

A Fuchsia Standard

To create your own fuchsia standard, patience is required. It takes at least two years to train a pleasing standard shaped plant. You will need to protect your plant in winter (see below). To train a standard, start with a plant that has a good strong main stem. Pot it up with good potting soil, and start by pinching out any side shoots that appear above the leaf joints, leaving leaves on the stem itself to provide nutrients for your growing plant. Insert a stake and tie the stem to it. As needed as the plant grows, repot, re-stake and continue to pinch off side shoots. When the fuchsia is about three sets of leaves taller than you want your standard to be, pinch out the top shoot to stop upward growth. Pinch out the tips of the side shoots growing at the top of the plant until the head thickens up. When you have a nice, bushy head, remove all the leaves growing on the main stem, leaving it clear. Keep the plant staked and repot as required and protect in winter, and you will have an enviable, show stopping fuchsia standard!



Overwintering Tender Fuchsias

Overwintering tender fuchsias in pots requires that they be brought inside to protect them from freezing, either into a greenhouse or garage, or into the house. Prior to bringing in, gradually harden off by reducing fertilizer after about August. Stop fertilizing in mid-September and allow the berries to develop. Bring them in after the first frost. A shed or garage at about 35–40 degrees F works fine. Light level is not important, as the fuchsia can be without light for a few months while dormant. Check regularly to ensure the soil around potted fuchsias is moist, as they should not dry out. Mist them occasionally to add humidity. If they are kept in the house where the environment is drier, placing the pots on a pebble tray with water will add to the humidity. Per the Oregon Fuchsia Society, more plants are lost to drying out than to cold. Prune them back quite severely in early spring, as flowers will be borne only on new growth.

Propagation of Fuchsias

Fuchsias are easy to propagate from cuttings. Select a healthy plant of your desired variety. Use a sharp knife to remove the growing tip of a young stem, just above the second pair of mature leaves. Perlite, vermiculite or sphagnum moss can be used as a potting medium, watering it first. Make a hole with a pencil to insert the stem. Trim the leaves to prevent moisture loss. Water, label and cover with a plastic cover to keep in moisture. A clear

bottle bottom with holes inverted over the plant works fine. Keep moist while the tops begin to grow, indicating roots have developed. Once roots have started, remove the plastic cover during daylight to accustom the plant to a less humid atmosphere. When the plant is growing well, plant in a loose soil mix and continue to water and pot on as needed.



If you have more questions about fuchsia growth or care, the following references will be of help to you. Have fun with your fuchsia fantasies!!

References

[Caring for Fuchsias](#)

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Rosenfeld, Richard. Fuchsias, DK Garden Guides, DK Publishing, Inc, 2003.

Mikolajski, Andrew. Fuchsias Lorenz Books, 1997.

[How to Take Fuchsia Cuttings](#), Johnston, John W.

Oregon Fuchsia Society

Tabor Heights United Methodist Church

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Portland, OR

Meeting 7 PM 3rd Tuesday of the month except January, July and December

[Northwest Fuchsia Society](#)

[The Earthworks Fuchsias](#)

[Monnier's Country Gardens. LLC](#)

[Fuchsia](#), Wikipedia