

**My new 2010
F.G.M Perspective**
By Rodney Bergquist

Background: When I was AFS President, I promoted throwing away all fuchsias that showed any signs of fuchsia gall mite (**F.G.M**) plant damage, thinking it would help us to pull the infected plants out of the system. The reality was, at the end of my three year term, the fuchsias that were thrown away, always seemed to be my favorites. The results of this method of control was, my collection of fuchsias always ended up being the plants left over from our previous plant sale. When asked, nine out of ten AFS members in California said, that they were not going to throw away their **favorite fuchsias** because of plant damage. That one simple statement indicates to me that the majority of AFS members feel we need to focus on a simple control method that will allow everyone to keep and enjoy their favorite fuchsias.

As a fuchsia enthusiast in California we can no longer allow the fear of (F.G.M.) plant damage to be paralyzing. Our ability to gain new members and restore the popularity of fuchsias in the public's eye is being threatened. It's interesting how people stopped caring for their fuchsias when we learned about the gall mites, we just watched the plant damage multiply and get ugly. Then we took lots of pictures of the ugly and showed everybody in the world just how ugly it could get if you do nothing to control them. Reminds me of a reality show, where you emphasizes the extremes. It's not natural for gardeners to not perform plant maintenance on a continuing basis and I think we may have forgotten that the ugly pictures represent the extreme and are not the norm. Mother Nature has certainly provided us with a significant pest that needs to be controlled, but so are spider mites, whitefly and rust which must be treated during the initial population stages or you will end up with an infestation that will be very difficult to treat. To control and minimize gall mite plant damage you must cut it off during the initial stages of growth.

Micro pruning works: In our yard, micro pruning is quick, easy and works well as a basic gall mite control method. **I always say that if you cut off the visual plant damage today, and I visit your home tomorrow, I will immediately be drawn to your beautiful fuchsia flowers.** Our landscape fuchsia's, one of which is 'Cardinal', is at least 10 feet tall and *F. magallencia* is over six foot tall, both have been a part of our landscape for over 40 years. Both fuchsias have had gall mite plant damage several times during the last 10 years. However you will not normally see the plant damage they caused in our yard. Why is that? It's because we understand the need to check our fuchsias often and **snip off the bad areas, during the initial stage of growth, maybe two or three times a year**, so it will not be a distraction to anyone visiting our yard.

Personally, I now realize and accept the fact that the gall mites are not going away, for a lot of reasons, one being they belong to Mother Nature and Mother Nature normally has a 10% survival rate built in to most things. Another reason would be we all seem to have different degrees of concern or interest in putting forth the effort required to control them. Last but not least, we have very little control over hummingbirds, our neighbor's fuchsias, and fuchsias grown in the wild or our desire to bring home new fuchsias. For some people it's much easier to just grow fuchsias as annuals and that fine. With all things being considered, I still want to be a fuchsia grower and have my favorite fuchsias as part of my collection.

Gall mite resistant fuchsias: First off I want to explain what a gall mite resistant fuchsia is NOT. It's not a perfect fuchsia that does not get any leaf or bud damage. The key word for gall mite resistant fuchsia is resistant. These fuchsias will resist galling or blistering into large closed fist type galls or something really ugly. However the leaves will certainly show some signs of leaf blemishes when bugs, insects or gall mites are chewing on a leaf or a bud. The gall mite resistant fuchsia concept reminds us that various degrees of plant damage are inevitable and a normal part of Nature. Gall mite resistant fuchsias would obviously be the best choice for use as landscape fuchsias because they have somewhat proven themselves durable and resistant. If the amount of plant damage becomes unacceptable or uncontrollable we can always replace the plant, just like we would any other plant in our garden.

For the good of our society and the future of our fuchsia's in America, **we need to teach our members and the general public how to aggressively identify F.G.M. plant damage in its early stages of growth.** In 2010 we need to focus on **micro pruning off the visual negative and turning it into a visual positive.** Do not wait until the baby gall mites which are feeding on the leaf or bud mature and move on to other branches causing more plant damage. It really makes no sense to let them multiply. We need to regain control over of our fuchsia hobby and get excited again about sharing our fuchsias with others. In today's fuchsia culture, especially in California, it is unrealistic to believe, that you can be a fuchsia grower and not perform the required plant maintenance.

List of Gall Mite Resistant Fuchsias: In order to validate a fuchsia as a gall mite resistant fuchsia, gall mites must be transferred from a plant that has live gall mites, to a plant that does not have gall mites. Fuchsia gall mites cannot be seen with the human eye without a 40+ magnification microscope. What we actually see is some of our plants have the plant damage, while other plants in the same area do not. I am not aware of anyone in the American Fuchsia Society other than maybe Peter Baye as having a 40+ magnification microscope who is verifying that live gall mites actually exist on a fuchsia. **My point is:** realistically the American Fuchsia Society cannot indorse this list of fuchsias received from various members as 100 % gall mite resistant. What we can say is, Peter Baye and Mary Cooks have actually tested there fuchsias. Other members have reported that the fuchsias on this list are still doing exceptionally well in there yard, sometimes surrounded by other fuchsias that have experienced F.G.M. plant blemishes. In our October-December 2009 issue of our bulletin, page 8, Kathy Lewark's article titled, "Better Fewer But Better", also lists fuchsias that are doing well in there yard even after several years of experiencing various degrees of F.G.M. outbreaks. The fuchsias on this list are in the process of proving themselves to be somewhat resistant to the gall mites, only requiring minimum maintenance, yet still requiring some maintenance like most other plants. You may want to consider adding them to your 2010 shopping list.