

## FALL CUTTINGS ARE EASY TO ROOT

*By Chuck Hassett*

Early autumn is a good time for taking fuchsia cuttings. Avoid the hard brown stems if possible and choose instead some cutting material from soft tip growth or greenish semi-hard stems. If cuttings are to be taken from a mature plant, all flowers, buds and seed pods should be removed ahead of time. Feed the plant with a high nitrogen fertilizer for a week or two to soften the growth and inhibit its tendency to flower.

Three basic requirements for successful rooting are warmth, light and humidity. Outside temperatures are generally favorable for rooting in late summer and early fall. Without bottom heat, rooting can be achieved in four to six weeks as long as temperatures remain well above the freezing point. If bottom heat is applied at 54-70° F. and the leaf zone is kept a few degrees cooler, fuchsias will root very rapidly, often within ten days. Good light is a must, but direct sun can be harmful. If you don't have a good spot in indirect light, create your own filtered light with shade cloth, an old gauze curtain or something similar.

Constant humidity is essential to keep your cuttings alive. Because they have no roots, the only way for cuttings to absorb moisture is through the leaves. Since they also *lose* moisture through their leaves, it must be constantly replaced.

One way to insure adequate humidity in the air surrounding a small number of fuchsia cuttings is to make a mini greenhouse. Use a plastic pot and cover it with a plastic bag – the kind they use for bagging produce at the market. Put small stakes in the corners or cut and shape a wire coat hanger into arches to keep the bag off the plants. Several cuttings will fit in a six inch pot, but this system could easily be enlarged to cover a flat holding dozens of cuttings.

A good rooting medium can be made by mixing vermiculite and perlite in equal amounts. But if you are starting with only a few cuttings, you may want to try sticking each cutting directly into its own two-inch pot filled with a light sterile potting mix. This will save one repotting step and avoids the setback with sometimes occurs when a rooted cutting is moved from one kind of medium to another.

Cuttings taken from healthy, well water plants will root best. Cut just below a node, usually about three inches from a tip. Strip the lowest set of leaves, leaving at least two sets remaining. If the leaves are large, cut them in half to reduce moisture loss by transpiration. Moisten the rooting medium and make holes about two inches apart with a dibble or any suitable pointed tool. Rooting hormone is not necessary, but if cuttings are taken from plants growing out of doors in garden soil, it is wise to dip them in a fungicide such as Captan. Insert the cuttings deep enough so that the lower node is well covered. Firm the medium gently against each stem by pressing lightly or by watering it. Always label cuttings immediately with their correct name and the date.

Check cuttings daily to make sure the medium is moist but not soggy. Remove any cuttings that die. After about a month, give the cuttings a *gentle* tug to see if they have rooted. The leaf color will generally turn to a brighter green as soon as roots have formed. If they are not ready, make sure that conditions remain suitable and give them more time.

When cuttings have several roots at least a half inch long, they should be carefully lifted from the rooting medium with a fork. Transplant them to 2-3 inch pots using a sterile potting mix that provides good drainage. Protect the young plants for a couple of weeks against extremes of temperature and sun to give them a chance to get established, then feed every week with half strength water soluble fertilizer.

American Fuchsia Society BULLETIN of September 1986