

## HOW TO TRAIN A FUCHSIA STANDARD OR TREE

1. Start with a vigorously growing fuchsia rooted cutting that has not had the top pinched out. You want to train a trunk that is as straight as possible. Put a bamboo stake very close to the stem punched into the soil to the bottom of the pot. Tie with one-inch strips of old nylon hose or green nursery tape. Use something soft that will not cut into the brittle young stem. The tie needs to be firm enough to hold the stem against the stake, but not so tight that it restricts growth. Place a tie every two to four inches as the stem grows. Check old ties to be sure they are not too tight as you add new ones. Replace old ties as needed.
2. Remove new branches in the leaf axils close to the stem, as they grow. Do not take off leaves on the main stem because they are manufacturing food to support the plant. During the time that the plant is growing its main trunk, it is helpful to keep it in a low light spot which will cause the plant to grow quickly to reach the desired height. It may be a little spindly, but it will grow into a strong trunk when you put it in stronger light. Continue to remove new side growth and tie the stem to the stake until it reaches the approximate height at which you want the head to form. I leave the new side shoots in the top five or six joints as the plant grows. If the plant accidentally loses its growth tip at any stage you will have side growth in place to start forming the head. When all the side shoots have been removed and the tip is accidentally broken out, it can take quite a while for new growth to begin so you can form the head.
3. Transplant into a larger size pot as the roots comfortably fill the pot. Feed and water it like all of your other fuchsias. Do not make the mistake of putting it into too large a container for the size of the roots. The soil could stay too wet and rot the entire root system.
4. Pinch out the top growth tip when it reaches a height that suits you. If you are working with a trailing fuchsia variety you will be growing a basket on top of the trunk. The five or six side shoots you left growing on the stem need to be pinched  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch past the first point. Keep up the fertilizing program; place the plant in good strong light, but not hot sunshine, to grow compact shoots to form a tight head. A fuchsia hat (wire frame that resembles an upside-down wire basket) is helpful to support the foundation of the head and protect it from breaking in a strong wind. The fuchsia hat is nailed to the top of a wooden stake, which now replaces the training stake. The stake should be a few inches taller than the top of the trunk. As the new growth is pinched and grows, it will spread and come up through the frame. Keep all the shoots pinched tightly as you guide it to have new growth across the whole width of the frame. Now you can let the outer branches grow longer and start to hang down in an umbrella shape. Forming the head framework is an ongoing process for the life of the standard. Continue to pinch the center growth as needed to keep the growth full at the top and gradually hang down as you do with a basket.
5. If your new stem is of an upright fuchsia variety, you will want to visualize it differently than the trailing type. Your artistic eye, the way the plant wants to grow and a lot of good luck will produce a very pleasing shrub or bush on the top of the trunk. You may want to form a head that is wider at the bottom and covers a larger percentage of the trunk. I like to work towards a triangle with equal sides or even a little wider on the bottom. Pinch to produce lots of shoots and to keep your plant

balanced. Some varieties will respond well to forming a ball shape. Just keep trying different varieties and you will be amazed at the different forms you produce. Don't be upset if the shape does not develop exactly as you hoped. This is an ongoing project and can be reshaped when you prune the plant back to a tighter framework at the end of the growing year.

6. Over winter put your tree where it will not be frosted, just as you do with your fuchsia baskets. When you bring your tree in to store it is the best time to prune it. Cut back to one node past the last pinch or to the shape you want to begin with next spring. Watch very carefully to be sure the roots to not dry out completely, but do not keep it too wet. We used to mark our calendar to check the fuchsias weekly when there were not very many stored in the garage.

7. When you are ready to restart your tree in spring, it will need some root pruning and new soil to start it on its way to a much bigger and more beautiful tree. Our trees are in cedar boxes. Because they are awkward to transplant, we use a serrated knife and cut out the roots about two inches from the box clear to the bottom. Then remove all the loose soil and roots you can, including the loose soil on the top of the roots. Refill with new soil and away you go for another wonderful year. Pinch the new growth to provide the shape you want. We transplant into a box about two inches larger every other year.

The more trees you grow the more different looks you will produce and the easier it will become. Just be sure to have fun with them. Happy fuchsia tree growing!

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