

## Waking Your Fuchsias by Verna Berger



Waking your fuchsias is somewhat similar to waking your children. Some are early birds, others sleepy heads. With those that seem eager to burst into spring, exercise caution. There can be many a cold night yet to come. Beautiful sunny days present a great opportunity to set plants out for the day. It really gives them a boost. Be sure to bring them back inside once the temperature begins to drop, or place them in a very protected area outside, such as under a porch or table and cover with plastic, protecting them from the elements. Respected sources say it's best to wait until Mothers day to set your container fuchsias out permanently for the summer. An unexpected cold night can really give these newly awakened plants a setback.

Repotting can be done now, prior to the onset of new growth. Some growers repot every year, others prefer every couple of years. Whatever works for you is fine. Who can argue with success? Those who pruned back their plants in the fall will not need to prune now, unless you only did a partial pruning so your plant would fit into the storage area. However, for those of you who are spring pruners, now is the time. Cut out all wispy, weak growth, leaving only sturdier branches. The remaining branches should be cut back to a point, which would leave 2 or 3 nodes for buds to appear, if they haven't already done so. Older plants may have loose bark, unlike the smooth lightwood produced by newer plants. This bark should be rubbed off. Sure wouldn't want to leave any secret hiding places for pests.

Once pruning is completed, you are ready to repot your plants. After removing the plant from the pot, loosen the old soil around the roots. Thick dark roots may have become entangled as they wound around the inside of the pot. These need to be trimmed back some and straightened out, giving the fine hair-like roots room to develop. These finer roots carry the nutrients needed for beautiful fuchsias. Some growers cut back roots severely, but we haven't had much luck with that. As previously stated whatever works for you is fine.

If you have wintered over plants in 2" pots, they are probably ready to be potted up to 4" containers now. Not sure if they are ready? Gently remove the plant and look at the roots. If there are tiny white roots all the way to the bottom of the pot, they are ready to be potted up. Some plants may have shriveled branches showing no visible signs of life. Cut the branch and see what's inside. Is it white, green, brown or yellow? If it's white or green, you're in luck; your plant is alive. It's probably one that wants to sleep a little longer. If you find brown or yellow inside, the branch is dead. With your fingernail, gently scrape the main branch just below soil level. If it is green underneath, the plant is alive. Even though the upper branches are dead, the plant will produce new growth from the roots. Don't give up too early. We have had presumed dead plants suddenly burst into new growth as late as June. (in my case, usually in the compost heap, and always with the tag removed! That is why I have so many tagged "another compost fuchsia" SJ)

Plants in storage areas may begin growth that is spindly and pale green, almost white. Remove all this new growth since it will never be strong enough to support blossoms. A natural result of fuchsias waking up is increased thirst, thus resulting in having to increase our watering frequency. We also begin our fertilizing at this time. Be sure to water thoroughly before fertilizing, since the fertilizer can burn a plant that has dry roots.

Resist the temptation to remove the mulch from your fuchsias in the ground. Removing the mulch too early could result in a set back for your plants if we get some very cold nights. Night temperatures should be consistently in the mid 40's to be on the safe side. As a rule, late April is usually a safe time to awaken your in ground fuchsias.

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