

# Lavant Horticultural Society

**"Fuchsias" – a talk by Derek Dexter**

*11<sup>th</sup> December 2019*

Derek started growing fuchsias in 1999; in 2004 he joined British Fuchsia Society and started showing in their championship shows. He has exhibited at RHS Hampton Court, winning bronze, silver & then silver-gilt in the window box & hanging basket class, until this class was discontinued. Dahlias are still a hobby in his back garden, as he is still in full-time employment and can only devote evenings and weekends to them.

## **Overwintering dahlias in pots:**

Keep dry, so sap does not rise up stem - cut back the top growth by a good half or so, then take off all leaves. Through winter just keep compost barely moist. Leave dormant until January.

Mid-January (if you have a heated greenhouse) repot them – look for fleshy white roots (if not, there may be vine weevil grubs eating the roots).

Wash off roots – saw off bottom 1/3 of root ball and repot. Can be repotted in the same size pot – Derek has found no need to pot up or down, as if sometimes recommended.

Three plants will do better in the one pot, rather than just one plant – even championship shows now no longer have a restriction limiting the number of plants in any one pot to one plant.

Try to keep the development of the plant level when pinching out stems.

Spray woody the twigs that form the structure of the plant once a day with lukewarm water – in 10-14 days green shoots will start breaking through.

## **Taking cuttings:**

You can start taking cuttings mid-January in a warm greenhouse, otherwise it is best to leave until March.

Small cuttings suffice – remove all but the top two pairs of leaves. If the remaining leaves are big, they can be cut in half.

You can see when the cuttings root, as the tips turn lighter. Pinch out above third pair of leaves to make plant bushier.

Every Sunday Derek picks up each individual plant and turns it through 180° to help it develop evenly.

## **Hardy fuchsias:**

Don't touch hardy fuchsias in winter – leave the top growth intact to help protect against frost – also put 2-3 inches of leaf mould around crown for additional frost protection.

Don't cut top growth back until the second week of April.

Before this, from mid-March, start spraying with lukewarm water to encourage green shoots to break out from the woody stems.

## **Stem cuttings from hardy fuchsias:**

Cut 6 inch of stem below a leaf joint – strip off all leaves except the very top ones – insert in compost, around side of plastic pot, keeping cool, with the compost just moist.

## **Pests**

**Fuchsia gall mite** – gnaws over tips – attacks hardy fuchsias – looks as if tips are burnt.

Cut down affected plants by half and put what is cut off into bin bags and dispose of in household waste to go to landfill.

Do not put into green bin for recycling, as this mite likes heat and will survive composting.

This pest is spread by wind, on animals, birds and even on clothing.

**Whitefly** – Derek uses '*SB Plant Invigorator*'. Starts to spray mid-May, even before sees any whitefly, and then sprays every 6 weeks.

**Red spider mite** – keeps atmosphere moist, by watering floor of greenhouse, as red spider mites like dry heat.

**Vine weevil** – uses ‘*Provado*’ in spring and in autumn. Do not forget hardy fuchsias in garden beds, as these need to be treated as well as containerised plants.

**Elephant hawk moth** – this is protected and so cannot be killed, but its caterpillars love fuchsias and can strip a plant overnight. So you need to pick them off by hand.

**Time from last pinching out to best flowering:**

Singles	(4 petals)	60 days
Semi-doubles	(6 petals)	70 days
Doubles	(8 petals)	80 days
Triphillas		90 days

Most fuchsias like part sun /part shade, i.e. dappled shade.

However, fuchsias with variegated foliage need full sun to maintain the variegation.

Conversely, fuchsias with white flowers (e.g. ‘Annabel’) need to be in shade to stay white, as the sun will promote some pinkness.

**Standard fuchsias**

Cannot de-leaf standard fuchsias as need leaves on top to keep sap rising.

However, you can lay the plant on its side, meaning that the sap does not need to be pushed up the vertical stem, but can just flow horizontally. In this way, the leaves can be removed from the top.

Important that plant is regularly turned to keep development even.

Derek mixes ‘*Big Moss*’ in with his potting compost. This is sphagnum moss that can absorb 20 times its own weight of water – this not only helps keep the compost moist, but helps with rewetting if it is left to dry out.

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These are just some notes on salient points and cannot attempt to replicate Derek’s excellent talk.

Any comments / corrections to [website@lavanthortsoc.org.uk](mailto:website@lavanthortsoc.org.uk)