

Fantastic fuchsias for the landscape

The large number of quality hardy selections on the market often catches gardeners unaware



FRY ROAD NURSERY

Fuchsia 'Old Fashioned' (top) is a very upright selection, growing to three feet tall and wide. *F.* 'Delta's Sarah' (inset) makes a strong impression with its unusual color combinations.

By Elizabeth Petersen

Everyone knows fuchsias for the hanging baskets that appear before Mother's Day and bloom all summer, but fewer know hardy fuchsias as versatile landscaping plants.

"I was blown away when I discovered how many types, forms, colors and habits of hardy fuchsias there actually are," said Ann Detweiler, owner of Fry Road Nursery in Albany, Ore.

It was a visit to Ron and Debbie

Monnier's specialty fuchsia nursery in Woodburn, Ore. that opened her eyes. There, she learned that hardy fuchsias produce striking floral displays like their tender relatives, but they keep blooming, often into very late fall, when the foliage and flowers of most other plants are long gone. And they develop into attractive shrubs in the garden.

"Ron and Debbie worked very hard to develop unique, excellent new varieties," Detweiler said. "They were very picky about which ones they brought to market."

Plants earned introduction after surviving three consecutive years in the



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ground in Woodburn and displaying good habits and unique flower forms or colors. Or they could be introduced if shown to be an improvement on existing, similar cultivars.

Although the Monniers closed their Woodburn growing operation in 2009, they offered their collection of fuchsias to Detweiler, whose specialty nursery grows an assortment of exotics, tropicals and the hard-to-find. Not all of the collection could be preserved, but Fry Road Nursery is currently growing about 350 hardy fuchsias and gradually introducing new selections to the market.

The new collector division is called “Fuchsia Shock.” The name — a play on the title of Alvin Toffler’s nonfiction book *Future Shock* — captures the surprise people express when they discover the diversity of fuchsias. “As a retailer, the breadth of the collection means you can offer a set of ‘new’ fuchsias every year for years without repeating yourself,” Detweiler said.

To raise interest in these plants, Fry Road Nursery has installed most of the collection into a series of display beds in full sun to emphasize the sun tolerance of fuchsias.

“When folks see the selection of over 500 variations on a theme (including tender types) here at the nursery, they are generally just as overwhelmed as I was the first time I saw Ron and Debbie’s collection,” Detweiler said. “And when they see them growing all happy, compact, profusely blooming in the ground in full sun, it’s generally something of a shock as well. Many hardy fuchsias provide season-long color without complicated care regimens, and they can tolerate a wide range of exposures.”

Diverse forms, heights and habits make them versatile in the landscape. Some work well trailing over retaining walls or rambling along as groundcovers, while others make beautiful additions to the front and/or back of borders.

The yellow-green leaves and long, red flowers of *Fuchsia* x ‘Aurea’ make for a unique contrast in the garden. The stems and veins turn magenta in the fall, providing an additional point of interest.

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F. 'Pink Fantasia' (right) grows to about 18 inches and makes a striking impression with its pink sepals and purple-pink petals. *F. 'DebRon's White Linen'* (left), a hybrid by Ron and Debbie Monnier, is named for obvious reasons — its leaves are delicate, and it's one of the whitest fuchsias available. The pink pistils underneath provide an accent color.

Word is getting out

Word of the many hardy fuchsia options is getting out, said Maurice Horn, owner of Joy Creek Nursery, a retail and mail-order nursery in Scappoose, Ore.

Joy Creek Nursery has grown fuchsias in its gardens for almost 20 years, discovering which ones make it through the winter — and which ones don't. They started with about 70 forms, laid them out in the garden and "found ways to care for them," Horn said. A key tip to longevity is not to cut back stems on garden fuchsias until active growth begins at the base in spring. "If we cut them back to tidy up for winter, we cut back live wood," Horn said.

Many growers also recommend planting fuchsias an inch or two deep to better protect their roots in winter.

Joy Creek is a good testing ground for hardiness, since the location on a hillside above the Columbia River has colder conditions than those in either Portland or Seattle. When Joy Creek

first started selling fuchsias, few gardeners understood how versatile fuchsias are, Horn said. Things have changed, though, and hardy fuchsias are becoming popular in Northwest gardens.

"Why shouldn't they be?" he asked. "There is so much variety of flower shape and color, and they bloom for such a long time. They seem like naturals for our gardens. We have had incredible luck with the hardy fuchsias, and they are very big sellers for us now."

Horn advises thinking of fuchsias as mid-summer to later autumn interest and using them in combination with other plants. "They leave a blank spot in winter and early spring," he said, "but nothing that can't be solved by planting small spring bulbs as companions, perhaps crocuses."

In the Joy Creek gardens, the hardy fuchsias grow in full to half-day sun where they tend to produce buds more freely than in the shade, Horn said. Planted with long-blooming

shrubs such as hydrangeas, the flowers are stunning complements for the existing blooms of the shrubs. And, because many fuchsias are modest in size, they are also ideal planted with evergreen shrubs, Horn said, extending the bloom in a particular area of a garden often well into autumn.

About 100 hardy fuchsias grow in the gardens at Joy Creek, and most were still in full, colorful bloom when I spoke to Horn in mid-November.

Love those fuchsias

Blooming Nursery in Cornelius, Ore. also produces a selection of over 30 hardy fuchsias as finished containers and some as liners for the wholesale market.

"What's not to love?" asked June Condruk, sales/marketing coordinator at Blooming. "Hardy fuchsias bloom continuously from July to frost; they come in a variety of color combinations; they are as great in a container

or hanging basket as they are in the garden; they are not prone to disease or insects, although they can get some; and hummingbirds and butterflies are absolutely gaga over them!”

The choices at Blooming Nursery range in hardiness from USDA Zone 6 to Zone 9. The hardiest for the Pacific Northwest are *F. regia*, *F. speciosa* and many cultivars and varieties with *F. magellanica* heritage.

Blooming Nursery recommends fertile, moist but well-drained soil in a site with full morning sun to partial afternoon shade. Because they bloom for so long, a light application of all-purpose fertilizer is also helpful. Spring is the best time for pruning to keep plants bushy and compact. Mulching in late fall is a good idea too, to protect the crowns and ensure plants come back in spring.

At Blooming Nursery, fuchsias are in demand from spring to frost, with highest demand in July and August. They do well at garden centers as well as in the landscape trade.

According to Pam Snodgrass, owner of P & D Nursery Sales in Tualatin, Ore, demand for hardy fuchsias continues to increase. P & D grows several varieties, some of them dwarf and others large, in several colors.

“I see a strong demand for all perennials versus annuals in the landscape,” Snodgrass said. “As the X and Y generations grow up, they seem to like gardening, but not in the same ways their parents did.”

Concerns and confusion

In California, fuchsias have had a problem with gall mite that has reduced the number of suppliers, giving some Oregon growers, including Fry Road Nursery, the opportunity to propagate for southern growers as well.

Don Helsel, a breeder from the Crescent City Fuchsia Society, has focused on gall mite resistance, Detweiler said. His new introductions



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are less likely to host gall mites, or in the presence of gall mite, don't show distortion to the same degree.

People who love fuchsias really love them. The fuchsia community spans the globe from South America (original home of the fuchsia), to Germany, France, the U.K. and New Zealand — anyplace where the climate is similar to that of the Northwest, Detweiler said. She credits "these dear folks" with helping maintain and grow the collection at Fry Road by providing cuttings of any they lose, providing back up stock and bringing new varieties from far and wide.

A local TV show, Garden Time, has helped get out the word about the unfussiness of fuchsias in the ground with periodic segments on its show. For instance, a show that aired on May 26, 2012, featured *Fuchsia* 'Queen Esther'.

Confusion about the names of some hardy fuchsias has Joy Creek and other growers revising their catalogs.

Fuchsia magellanica, which is native to chilly, mountainous areas in South America, has contributed genetically to many hardy fuchsias thought to be variations of the species. However, recent genetic work has shown that these previously thought-to-be *magellanicas* are not true species.

The species has cross-pollinated readily and produced interesting variations, but there is only one true *F. magellanica*, Ron Monnier wrote in a Fuchsia Society newsletter.

The regular *F. magellanica* is an extremely hardy plant that has small red-over-blue-purple blossoms and small, thin, dark green foliage. It is a strong, upright, bushy grower that is often used to make a hedge or as a large background plant in a garden border, he wrote.

But even if they aren't true *F. magellanicas*, these cultivars are proven landscape plants. "Who really cares whether they are true species?" Monnier asked. "Use them. Love them. Enjoy them. For the majority of those who just want a nice blooming plant in the

landscape, these hardy, robust, beautiful and floriferous plants deserve a spot in the garden."

According to Detweiler, the Monniers are in the process of reconstructing their fuchsia breeding program in Milton-Freewater, Ore.. "And they are proving once again that fuchsias are much more winter hardy than thought if kept well-drained and planted deeply," she said. ©

Elizabeth Petersen writes for the garden industry and teaches SAT/ACT test prep at www.satpreppdx.com. She can be reached at gardenwrite@comcast.net or satpreppdx@comcast.net.

Defining a hardy fuchsia

The Northwest Fuchsia Society (www.nwfuchsiasociety.com) offers a wealth of information for gardeners, including a list of species, hybrids, and other cultivars of fuchsias that have been tested for at least three years in the Pacific Northwest.

To make the list, plants have to be hardy in different places on the West Coast of the Pacific Northwest area, defined as USDA Zone 8, minimum temperature 10-20°F, with some micro-climates in Zone 7 and 9.

Plants rated as **Very Hardy (VH)** come into bloom in May or June.

Plants rated as **Hardy (H)** come into bloom by the end of July and should be mulched in winter.

Foliage denotes colorful leaves.

E Encliandra cultivars are miniature.

S denotes single corolla

SD denotes semi-double

D denotes double

Sp denotes a sport

T is for trailing

Lax means somewhat upright

U stands for upright