



## November Flower of the Month: California Fuchsia

by Sue Rideout, Master Gardener

California fuchsia, a beautiful native wildflower, can be found in most of the state from mountains to deserts and in rocky dry soils. Fortunately they are well adapted to our valley, flourishing with little water or care. Horticulturists and wildflower enthusiasts call them *Zauschneria*, while botanists class them as *Epilobium canum*. By any name they can add zest to our late summer and fall gardens.

Shrubby perennials, California fuchsia sport small gray-green lance-shaped leaves with trumpet-like scarlet to orange blooms. Their silvery leaves and starch -storing roots reduce water loss enabling them to flourish along roadsides, on dry banks and in sun baked rocky soils. In our area they are perfect for containers, rock and gravel gardens, raised beds, stone walls, or just in an area that gets little irrigation.



California fuchsias range from low matting plants up to three foot sub-shrubs. Everett's Choice at 2 to 4 inches is one of the lowest growers as well as being very drought tolerant. Orange Carpet grows 4 to 6 inches tall with bright orange blooms but requires some shade and more regular water.

Dublin grows to one foot tall in an upright manner with scarlet flowers while Bowman reaches 2 feet in height. Catalina, my favorite, is a robust plant reaching four feet with profuse large blooms (1 ½ to 2 inches) and broad gray leaves.

Easily propagated, California fuchsia can be grown from seed, stem cuttings, or division. Seeds should be sewn in a good potting mix, barely covered and kept moist until germination. The seedlings grow rapidly and often bloom the first year.

Stem cuttings can be taken at any time, near the growing tip with several leaves included. Plant division is perhaps the easiest method if large growing specimens are available. In fall or winter take several stems with roots and rhizomes attached and water well in the new location. Starts are also available in nurseries and online at *CA Mountain Growers*.

California fuchsia requires full sun (at least 6 hours) and well-drained soil. They have low water needs but an occasional summer soaking may increase flowering. In winter they won't tolerate soggy roots. If the plants are getting rangy, they can be cut back to four to six inches after flowering. Light tip pruning during the growing season will shape and fill out the plant.

Other than root rot from over-irrigation California fuchsias have few problems. Robust varieties may need to be restrained from overwhelming the rest of your garden. Seedlings and young shoots are easy to pull out but don't wait too long. Older plants may need to be dug out vigorously!

California fuchsias have many uses in the landscape and garden. The low matting varieties are well-suited for stabilizing banks and don't mind the lack of water. Also known as Hummingbird flower, they are pollinated by these delightful birds in their natural habitat. Their fluted flowers are adapted for feeding, making California fuchsias a favorite among bird lovers. Their gray-green foliage makes a nice contrast in the summer garden green and bright flowers and then takes over in the fall with colorful blooms of their own. My Catalina variety is planted near firethorn bushes and their red-orange flowers and the orange berries of the firethorn make that corner of the garden glow in the fall.



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