

Fuchsia Options

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INTRODUCTION

Tamborine Mountain Plants is a specialist nursery reliant on only one major product for the year. Therefore, it is important to establish as many marketing options as possible of that one plant for success of our business. Tamborine Mountain Plants has become Australia's biggest fuchsia nursery. Our fuchsia marketing options are:

- As cuttings
- As tubes
- As 4-in. and 6-in. pots
- Baskets—6-in. and 8-in. plastic, fibre-lined 14 in.
- Retail—using mother stock beds as display gardens
- Mail Orders

Each stage of a product has an advantage to different customers.

PROPAGATION AND PRODUCTION

All our options start with a cutting. Usually seasonal variations play an important role in the availability of good cutting material. However, being a specialist nursery we have year-round availability of material.

Cuttings. Cuttings are light, free of roots, are easily packed in volume for export and airfreight, and do not require the excessive treatments that some countries' quarantine regulations require for rooted plant material.

Cuttings for our own production are taken over the months of December through to the end of January, and again in April to May. However, being a specialist nursery, good cutting material is available all year round.

A good quality cutting depends on:

- How it is taken
- Its origin (from stock or mother plants or production plants)
- The cultivar selection.

The age and quality of the mother stock is vital for the vigour of the offspring. Stock beds are kept as a nucleus of each variety, and, of course, these have a real advantage as mature plants growing in beds lining the driveway and the parking area of the nursery. They give a fabulous display. However, it is from vigorously growing potted material at the optimum of nutritional value, and in a vegetative state, that I aim to obtain all my cutting material for production. These source plants are then regrown to flowering stage and sold. Fresh grown potted plants are then used for further cutting material, constantly selecting the best plants of the given number grown.

Tubes. As the nursery was established 15 years ago, 2-in. tubes in wire trays are the major units used. I have since found cells have limited holding time, whereas tubes give me about a month leeway without them losing quality.

We propagate our fuchsias in a 3 perlite : 1 peat (v/v) mix . These components have a definite and constant standard and are considered free of pathogens, and are all that is used at the nursery as propagation medium.

This medium is lightweight, free draining (vital for our climate), and has none of the variations that our sand supplies can have. Although more costly, it does not take long for costs to balance if the cuttings strike more readily and more rapidly. Weight is also an important factor in the shipping of our mail orders which are despatched in these tubes. These completed trays are set out on wire benches under intermittent mist.

Pots. After each bench-full of tubes has initiated roots, the misting controls are turned off. The tubes are then fertilized with 14-6.1-11.6 Osmocote by hand. Gradually over the months of December and January we have sufficient tubes of Fuchsias for our main planting time. At the end of February the 50% shade cloth covering is then rolled off to sun-harden the plants. We then tip prune these plants, endeavouring to prune down to the last pair of leaves on each small plant, to encourage lateral growth. Once potted these are placed in the main field sections of the nursery. The full winter sunlight enables the plant to produce short internodal growth and the varieties chosen will flower, covering the plant canopy with blooms and following buds. Potted colour will always sell!

Standards. It is, however, prior to this time that we select the rooted cuttings suitable for standard fuchsias. Individual plant and cultivars are chosen on the following criteria:

- 1) Long straight stem
- 2) Not brittle
- 3) Ability to form a soft pliable canopy from as many lateral points as possible on the top three leaf nodes remaining on the plant at its final stopping height.

These are potted into small pots to begin the process of growing straight and tall in a protected position under shade.

We pot our major crop in the last week of March each year. When the tubes are brought to the potting area, they are once again tip pruned. A well organised team is selected from the staff, each of whom must be able to pot at least 1000 plants per day into 6-in. pots and lay them out in the field in rows.

These fields have the ground covered in black plastic and have been without any plants for at least 3 months.

Baskets. This really is making the most of a product. These are the eye-catching display plants from which the smaller pots are sold. As the propagation area empties of stock to be potted, we then pot the basket lines.

I use quite a few of what I term the "dual purpose" fuchsias—the rounded ball-shaped cultivars to pot into baskets, such as 'Cecile', as well as some of the more traditional plants, such as 'Pink Marshmallow'. I find these ball-shaped varieties are better to ship and display well in retail outlets when hung at eye-level. Full cascading varieties are quite impossible to ship economically without damage, and generally many of these varieties are quite straggly plants unless constantly pruned.

We pot three plants to every 8- and 14-in. basket and then hang them on hooks. The benches are used for further baskets, in early stages of growth, for future

hanging. Benches are also used for other lines, such as standard fuchsias.

The Retail Section. This was established two years after the wholesale section. Tamborine Mountain is a beautiful area near a subtropical rainforest national park. Its volcanic soil is famous for the production of 'Big Red' rhubarb, avocados, and cut flowers—including bulbs, and, of course, fuchsias.

Our nursery is within a perfect day-trip from the large populations centres of Brisbane and the Gold Coast and surrounding areas.

We stock our own propagation mix; hand-made, hand-painted T-shirts with fuchsias; earrings with fuchsias; coffee mugs with fuchsias; hankies and even hand-painted soap; plus, of course, all stages of fuchsias from starter plants to large baskets.

Mail Order. This is a part of the retail section. We advertise in two major garden magazines with a half-page advertisement and order form. Orders are despatched over the cooler half of the year. The advertisement also brings people from all over Australia to visit the Nursery.

We are gradually building on a reputation of knowledge and sharing that experience with our customers in the true I.P.P.S. ideal "To Seek and Share".