

Propagating Fuchsias

By Joel Murphy

When propagating fuchsias, I use a commercial potting mix and add perlite and a very small amount of chicken manure. The ratio is about $\frac{3}{4}$ potting mix to $\frac{1}{4}$ perlite. I usually don't use any sand in my prop mixes, as I find it holds too much water and clogs the drainage holes, causing many cuttings to rot. Perlite is good for preventing this, as the large particles aerate the mix and improve drainage.

Perlite is naturally occurring volcanic rock, when quickly heated to above 870 C, the rock 'pops' like popcorn as the water vaporizes and creates tiny glass-sealed bubbles - which account for its light weight. It has many commercial uses, but in horticulture it is used in propagation, hydroponics, and in potting medias.

After preparing my prop mix, I simply fill a punnet, multicell tray, or pot, and water the mix well. I never compact the mix as this reduces the amount of air, preventing root growth and more than likely causing the cutting to rot.

When selecting fuchsia cuttings, I try to use **firm cuttings** which don't bend easily, (usually 5-8cm in length). Soft cuttings tend to rot and lack the correct ratio of nutrients needed to produce roots. They are also prone to wilt very quickly, and struggle to take up enough water to support themselves.



To prepare the cutting, I remove the lower leaves, and leave about 6 upper-leaves on the stem. Then I cut these leaves in half. This reduces transpiration, and allows the plant to focus its energy to produce roots instead of trying to support its leaves. Before sticking the cutting, I cut about 2mm off the base of the stem below a node. This is because when the cutting is first removed from the plant, it 'sucks in' air. By removing this piece of stem, the plant can take up water and rooting hormone (if being used) more easily.



When sticking the cutting, you can either poke a hole with a stick to avoid damaging the stem, or simply push the cutting in by itself if the mix is soft enough. **For autumn/winter propagating**, after all cuttings have been stuck in

the mix, I push kebab skewers into the punnet/tray/pot. This creates a 'frame' to support a sheet of plastic or cling-wrap, which makes a mini-greenhouse. It creates a humid environment, and reduces the stress for the cuttings.



Then I simply wrap the plastic/cling-wrap over the punnet/tray/pot and tightly secure it with sticky tape. Then I place the punnet/tray/pot on a sunny windowsill, and leave it there for 3-4 weeks. After the 3-4 weeks are over, I carefully remove the plastic and very lightly 'tug' the cuttings. If they pull out of the mix easily they haven't rooted, but if there is resistance they have roots. You can also check to see if roots are coming out the bottom of the punnet/tray/pot.



Often you can tell if the cuttings have struck by any new green growth either from the top or side shoots. After the plastic is removed, the plants will often begin to stress as a result of the new less-humid conditions. Place the punnet/tray/pot in a shady position, or in an outside greenhouse. The punnet/tray/pot can be left there for another 2 weeks before moving the tray outside. You can either pot-up the rooted cuttings straight after these 2 weeks, or leave it outside to harden-off the plants. If frosts are a threat, I don't leave the cuttings outside - I keep them in the greenhouse for potting up in spring. Sometimes I'll pot-up the cuttings straight away, but I keep the pots in a protected position or in a greenhouse.





Cuttings in a tray on a sunny windowsill



Cuttings in a punnet on a sunny windowsill



Cuttings potted-up into tubes



A direct-stick cutting in a tube



A one-year old 'cutting'. This variety is 'Sundial'.