

Q: The ends of my fuchsia are thickened and twisted all out of shape. They have turned a reddish color. I can't see any insects. Is this a new disease?

A: What you are seeing is the result of a Fuchsia Gall Mite infestation on your plant. The Mites, '*Aculops fuchsiae*,' are very tiny and difficult to see without a microscope. In the 1980s this mite found its way from Brazil to California, causing major havoc with nurseries and home gardeners as they spread throughout the coastal areas of California. The mites can be found on growing tips of susceptible varieties of fuchsias throughout the year, causing the new growth to emerge twisted and seriously deformed. The thickened foliage is referred to a 'Gall.' Plants that have been seriously distorted by the insects should be pruned enthusiastically, and the infested material bagged and thrown out unless you have a very hot compost pile in which to bury the prunings. Check the surrounding area for other infestations that can be removed. You may want to wear disposable gloves, and wipe your Pruners with rubbing alcohol between cuts to prevent inadvertently spreading the mites. Wiping good pruners with rubbing alcohol is hard on the blades, so clean and coat with a silicon lubricant when you are finished.

Once the pruning is completed, fertilize with a slow-release form of Nitrogen and water the plants deeply. This mite spreads via wind, insects, people and perhaps by hummingbirds. The best recommendation for reducing Fuchsia Gall Mite damage is to replace the susceptible plants with resistant varieties.

The following fuchsias appear to be resistant: Baby Chang, Chance Encounter, Cinnabarina, *F. boliviana*, *F. minutiflora*, *F. microphylla* subsp. *hindalgensis*, *F. radicans*, *F. thymifolia*, *F. tincta*, *F. venusta*, Isis, Mendocino Mini, Miniature Jewels, Ocean Mist and Space Shuttle.

A list of highly susceptible cultivars and species is available from the Master Gardener office, ph# (925) 646-6586.

Several Miticides are currently registered for Fuchsia Gall Mite Control. Contact your certified Nurseryperson for specific recommendations. Most of the Miticides need to be applied frequently, with the unwanted side effect of killing many of the predaceous Mites that are the natural enemies of the plant-feeding Mites.