

# The British Fuchsia Society

## FUCHSIA GALL MITE



In early September 2007 Fuchsia Gall mite (*Aculops fuchsiae*) was found for the first time on the mainland of the United Kingdom and there have been many more cases since, all in the south of England.

## What are Fuchsia Gall Mites?

The Fuchsia Gall Mite is a microscopic sap-sucking pest that is specific to fuchsias. Fuchsia Gall Mites are small between 0.20 and 0.25mm long. The mites feed by puncturing individual plant cells with their needle-like mouthparts and sucking out the cell contents. The feeding activities of the mites cause the plants cells to grow abnormally and proliferate, causing swelling (galling) and disfigurement of the growing tips, leaves and flowers. The mite has four life-cycle stages, egg; larva; nymph and adult. Female mites lay up to 50 eggs at a time and these take 4 - 7 days to hatch. The life-cycle takes 21 days to complete and so populations' build-up very rapidly. All the stages are able to over winter within the bud scales of the host.

## How to identify Fuchsia Gall Mite damage

The mites infest new growth at the shoot tips where they suck sap and secrete chemicals that prevent the normal development of growing tips, leaves and flowers. As the infestation increases the foliage becomes increasingly distorted and there is often a swelling along with the distortion. Infected areas can look hairy, or more hairy than normal. This continues until the plants can no longer produce normal leaves or flower buds. The growth at the shoot tips consists of a mass of distorted tissue instead of leaves or flower buds. Some fuchsias are more resistant than others, so the severity of symptoms can vary. Fuchsia Gall Mite is no longer a notifiable pest. The pictures in this leaflet give an idea of what it can look like.

## Why are Gall Mites such a concern?

Once established this pest breeds rapidly, with one female mite giving rise to a potential population of over 125,000 mites in only three generations! It also spreads readily between plants and once present it is very difficult to control. The mites overwinter under bud scales but may remain active during the winter on glasshouse fuchsias. The mite seems able to survive outside in sheltered conditions, which seems to explain its proliferation in some areas.

## How can Gall Mites be spread?

In North America, man accidentally introduced Fuchsia Gall Mite over twenty years ago and it is believed to have been spread further by hummingbirds and bees, but wind and human activities seem to be the main means of dispersal. We may not have hummingbirds but we do have the other agents.

Without question, the main culprit for transferring this pest is likely to be ourselves, this is because Gall Mites are so small, and hard to detect, especially when present at low levels that they are easily overlooked and can be inadvertently transferred between growers on plants and cuttings, and from plant to plant on clothing, etc. If dealing with a plant that has Fuchsia Gall Mite then think carefully about your next move – and clean tools, etc., especially when cutting back the plants. Contaminating more fuchsias should be avoided if care is being taken..

## So what can we do?

At present it would appear that there are no chemicals that will effectively control this pest, so we need to adopt other tactics.

- Be careful about where you get your fuchsias from and be on the lookout for plants bearing the symptoms described above.
- Don't take cuttings of fuchsias from the wild or in public areas. If offered a cutting think twice and have a look around at all their plants for any signs of damage.
- Only buy from sources that you can be sure of.
- If buying from a nursery - look around and check for **GALL MITE** damage before purchasing any plants.
- Only buy from mail order sources you can be sure of.
- Remember that Fuchsia Gall Mite has been found in many cases in Brittany and the Channel Islands – so if you are thinking of bringing plants or cuttings back from either of these places **DON'T!** (Although it is not illegal it is not advisable)..
- Check your plants weekly during the growing season.
- Without intruding, keep an eye on fuchsias in neighbouring gardens and hedgerows and wherever else you go. If this seems wrong, just remember if a neighbour gets it and you do nothing, then you will get it too and so will all your friends.

## What to do if you suspect the presence of Fuchsia Gall Mite

At present this pest remains uncommon in most of the UK and we would suggest some possible ways of tackling the problem.

**Firstly** – cutting off the infested shoot tips will remove many mites but regrowth can become infested and so a weekly or regular check of your plants is required. Prune away any new growth that is showing early symptoms. This has proved to be an efficient way of keeping Fuchsia Gall mite damage under control in the USA.

A severe autumn pruning of Fuchsias in the garden should also help – particularly in areas where the pest is known. Cutting back the plants to ground level and destroying the old season's growth will mean that there are fewer places for the pest to overwinter. Remember to wash your hands and secateurs, etc., before handling any other fuchsias.

**Secondly** – a more drastic solution which is the destruction of the plant/s. The original advice issued by FERA was that plants that show the damage should be dug up and the plants destroyed either by burning or by sealing in plastic bags and leaving in the sun until they are crisp. It is a method that is not always practical but we leave the choice to you.

**Thirdly** – Chemical control – it would appear that Gall Mites in general are relatively tolerant of pesticides and most home garden products will be ineffective. However we are advised that the use of products recommended for combating mites i.e. acaricides may have an effect in disrupting the life cycle if sprayed every 3 or 4 days over a period of 14 days. At present the only possible chemical control is Abamectin + thiamethoxam (Westland Plant Rescue Bug Killer Ornamental Plants ready to use) which we believe may give some control if applied when the symptoms start to appear.

## Some Quick Facts

**Common name** - Fuchsia Gall Mite.

**Scientific name** - Aculops Fuchsiae.

**Plants affected** - Garden and Greenhouse Fuchsias.

**Main symptoms** - Growth at the shoot tips is swollen and grossly distorted.  
Flowers are also deformed or fail to develop.

**Most active** - May to September.

**For Further Details Contact - The British Fuchsia Society**  
**at [www.thebfs.org.uk](http://www.thebfs.org.uk) and follow the link.**

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