

Phygelius Possibilities



Commonly known as cape fuchsia, phygelius could provide some interesting possibilities for extending the fuchsia season.

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This crop was mentioned in last year's Pack Trials coverage, and since then, we have done some work on its production. The genus phygelius is a wonderful group of somewhat fuchsia-like plants that come from South Africa and belong to the Scrophulariaceae family, making it a snapdragon relative. This genus has two species, *Phygelius capensis* and *Phygelius aequalis*. The main difference between the two species has to do with the architecture of the inflorescence. *P. capensis* has flowers that are evenly spaced around the stem; whereas *P. aequalis* has flowers hanging to one side. There are about 15 cultivars of the two species commercially available, many of which are interspecific hybrids.

PHYGELIUS BACKGROUND

These plants may not be familiar to most of us because the breeding has been done in England, where they have gained in popularity. Don't be surprised, though, if phygelius soon becomes as common in the United States as Guinness Stout. Maybe we shouldn't go that far, but with the development of a variety of colors, this plant has great potential in U.S. markets.

The fantastic thing about phygelius is its versatility. It is commonly used in mixed borders, where it can reach a height of 4 feet, but it also looks great in a hanging basket. In fact, the perfect height for really appreciating this plant is eye level, where the colorful throat of its drooping, trumpet-shaped flowers can clearly be seen and appreciated.

Phygelius tend to flower in flushes, and after each flush, plants can be cut back for another burst of color. The unusual flower shape and repeat blooming make it a great component in mixed containers. Additionally, the chartreuse foliage on some varieties such as phygelius 'Sunshine' will also provide dramatic contrast in a mixed container.

Phygelius are surprisingly tough, considering they come from a Mediterranean climate. The June 2004 issue of *GPN* includes an article by Art Cameron of Michigan State University discussing the possibilities for phygelius in the extreme North. According to Cameron, phygelius in their gardens have even survived a few Michigan winters, surprising for a plant that can also thrive in Florida.

When the "dog days" of summer hit the South, phygelius is one of those rare plants that can be "over-summered." It will tend to get lanky as the summer progresses but can be cut back to keep it in shape for a great fall display. In general, we are finding that cultivars of *P. x rectus* seem to exhibit better heat and sun tolerance than *P. aequalis*. As our breeding program gets a bit farther along we'll be able to make some recommendations on *P. capensis* as well. But for now, the more balanced flower racemes of *P. capensis* and *P. rectus* genetics seem most promising, as they can withstand rainfall, and the smaller leaves are less likely to scorch in full sun. Either group of phygelius are excellent in baskets, but the *P. x rectus* types are more upright in a basket, while *P. aequalis* leans outward for better basket presentation.



Top: phygelius 'Tredwidden Pink'. Bottom, left to right: Mixed cultivars in 6-inch pots; phygelius 'Salmon Leap'. (All photos courtesy of Matt Moyer)

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PRODUCTION CONSIDERATIONS

To produce this crop you really do not have to prepare for any special requirements; it should fit nicely into a regular production schedule. That is

Sources for *Phygelius*:

New Sensation – From Plant Haven

www.planthaven.com

Native Sons Nurseries

www.nativeson.com

Skagit Gardens

www.skagitgardens.com

Pacific Plug and Liner

www.ppandl.com

Yoder/Greenleaf Perennials

www.yoder.com

one of the beauties of this crop — it is so easy to grow. If growth regulation is needed, we have found that a drench of paclobutrazol is effective for height control. If the plant flowers out in an early flush and begins to look rough, simply shear it back, and it returns to flower in 3-5 weeks, depending on environmental conditions.

For those of us in the Deep South, where fuchsia has a typical life span of 5-7 days, *phygelius* are proving ▶



Phygelius 'Sani Pass Sensation' (left) and 'Sunshine' (right).

Culture Quickie: *Phygelius*

Fertilization. A balanced fertilizer at 150 ppm is fine; avoid high levels of ammonium nitrogen.

Watering. This plant loves water, and to some extent, water controls its growth. For best growth keep plants moist but avoid excess water as plants may stretch.

Media. Well-drained peat-lite type with a pH of 5.5-5.8.

Temperatures. This crop is very tolerant of temperature fluctuation, but try to maintain 60° F nights and 85° F days. We often see 90° F, and plants are fine as long as they are moist.

Light. Bright light (5,000+ foot-candles) is essential to good growth, branching, flowering and highest plant quality.

Propagation. By seed or cuttings (rooting media temperatures of 65-75° F).

Timing. Propagation takes 2-3 weeks, seedlings about 10 weeks from seed to transplant. From liner to finished 1-gal. takes 6-8 weeks, depending on environment.

Pinching. We have had the best luck getting full plants and multiple flowering branches using 1-2 pinches on 6-inch and basket production.

PGRs. In the South we use repeated pinches or shearing and paclobutrazol drenches at ¼-½ ppm to get full plants. We have not had much success with Florel on inducing branching, but growers in cooler parts of the country may find it helpful. NOTE: PGR rates vary widely by region, so always use caution when applying to a new crop.

Flowering. We have not seen any photoperiodic responses with this crop; as long as temperatures are optimal and water and fertility adequate the plants flower year-round.

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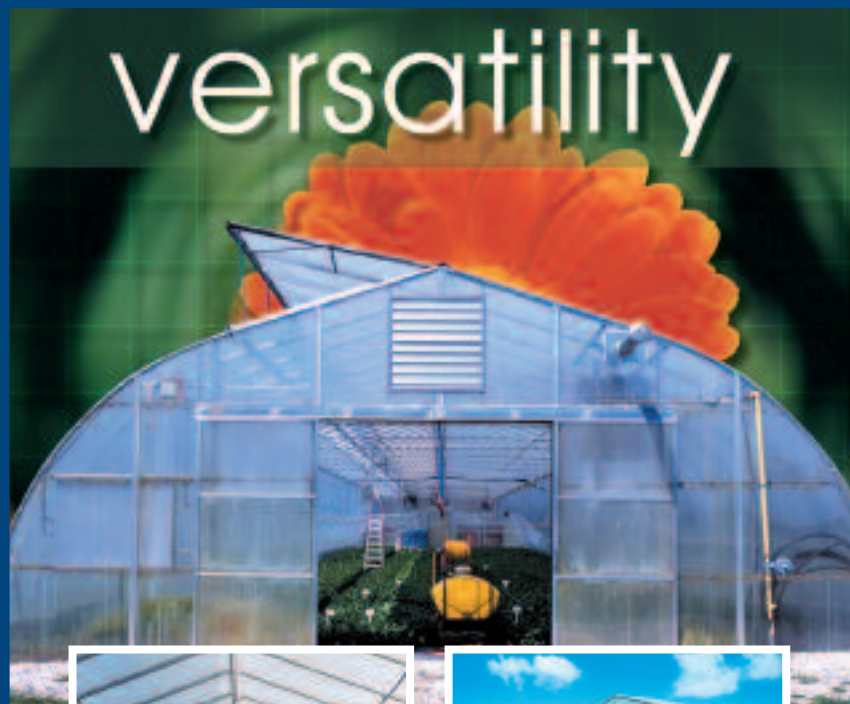
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Figure 1. Varying color, habit and flower structure throughout cultivars and species.

SCIENTIFIC NAME	CULTIVAR	COLOR	HABIT	FLOWER STRUCTURE
<i>P. aequalis</i>	Sani Pass Sensation	Fuchsia	Moderate	One sided
<i>P. aequalis</i>	Trewidden Pink	Pink with yellow throat	Large	One sided
<i>P. aequalis</i>	Yellow Trumpet	Pale yellow	Large	One sided
<i>P. x rectus</i>	Moonraker	Pale yellow	Moderate	Branched
<i>P. x rectus</i>	African Queen	Pink	Moderate	Branched
<i>P. x rectus</i>	Devils Tears	Bright red	Moderate	Branched
<i>P. x rectus</i>	Salmon Leap	Salmon orange	Moderate	Branched
<i>P. x rectus</i>	Pink Elf	Pink	Compact	Branched
<i>P. x rectus</i>	Winchester Fanfare	Coral pink with red	Moderate	Branched
<i>P. x rectus</i>	Sunshine	Pink w/ chartreuse foliage	Compact	Branched
<i>P. x rectus</i>	New Sensation	Fuchsia	Compact	Branched
<i>P. x rectus</i>	Raspberry Swirl	Pink with yellow throat	Moderate	Branched
<i>P. x rectus</i>	Aylesham Pride	N/A	Moderate	Branched
<i>P. capensis</i>	Caborn Flame	Orange with variegated foliage	Moderate	Branched
<i>P. capensis</i>	None	Orange	Moderate	Branched

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Phygelius 'Yellow Trumpet'.

to be a much more heat-tolerant and vigorous alternative. They don't have near the color range or flower dynamics (size and complexity of bloom) of a fuchsia, but produced as a basket they can create the same effect as single fuchsia with a lot less work. When the heat and humidity puts an end to those fuchsia flowers, the cape fuchsia can take over. GPN

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