



**BEGONIA SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

# Growing Begonias

*Info. Sheet 4*

## **Propagating from Cuttings**

Late Spring is a great time for propagating because the weather is warm enough for cuttings to form roots fairly quickly and the plants can be potted up and established before the really hot weather arrives. One of the weapons against our extreme heat is for plants to have good, healthy root systems which enable the plant to take up plenty of moisture to compensate for the rapid transpiration from the foliage.

A recommended propagating mix is: six parts Perlite, two peat moss, one gritty sand, one vermiculite. I find this is excellent for many cuttings but perhaps a 'softer' mix is more suitable for use in closed containers when propagating leaves and wedges.

In closed containers a mix of 50/50 sphagnum moss and sieved Perlite is usually successful. Another method is to place about 1.5 cm of sieved good quality potting mix in the base of the container and make sloppy wet with good quality water. Cover this with the same depth of sieved Perlite. The Perlite will soak up the surplus moisture and may need extra water to ensure that the Perlite is thoroughly dampened. Drainage holes or not is the grower's choice. The wedges or leaf-stem cuttings are inserted about half their depth into the mix. Whether plantlets form more quickly in this latter mix is debatable because of the different varieties of plants used, but the cuttings certainly make much larger root systems, which has to be a plus.

A closed container is a container with a fairly firm fitting clear plastic or glass cover. Plastic is safer and does not conduct heat so efficiently. The plastic containers with clear covers in which cakes and salads are sold are ideal. The containers should be placed in a warm, well-lit situation, but never in full sunlight.

A leaf-stem cutting is where a leaf with about 2cm of stem attached is used. A small leaf may be used as is; larger leaves can be cut down, leaving about 3cm of blade surrounding the stem. A wedge is any piece of a leaf which contains a main vein.

Nearly all rhizomatous, Rexes and distinctive foliage plants will grow from leaf cuttings. In the warmer weather plantlets should appear from four to twelve weeks, depending on the variety. Rex leaves usually seem to be the easiest and quickest to grow, so are good types for beginners to use and be encouraged.

The propagating mix must always be kept very damp and in the hot weather may need rewetting occasionally. Frequent misting with a liquid fertiliser is beneficial and may encourage cuttings to produce plantlets earlier.

If you are having a problem finding a misting bottle which lasts more than a few weeks, try using an emptied household cleaner sprayer container - pre-laundry spray or such. Of course, after thoroughly washing same.

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