



BEGONIA SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Growing Begonias

Info. Sheet 5

Pests and Diseases

For Begonia growers the winter and early spring months are very long but by now we can expect some good growth. Unfortunately the warmth also activates the pests and diseases which adversely affect our Begonias. It's a sad experience for growers when the first beautiful leaves unfold and they are already perforated with tiny holes or distorted by thrip or mites. Such leaves may as well be removed now because they are not going to improve. As the leaves grow so do the holes and the damage done to the main veins by mites/thrips won't allow the leaf to expand naturally. So early prevention is the answer.

MILDEW: Is at its worst during spring and autumn when we often experience warm days and chilly nights. A cover spray early in these seasons should prevent a lot of damage. Certain varieties of Begonias are more susceptible right through the season - semi tuberous, sutherlandii, Rexes, some shrub-like, canes and others. The grower will have to observe and learn which plants can be problems. Mildew will often appear first on the undersides of leaves so these should be checked regularly. The easiest, most effective and cheapest way to spray a few plants is to use a 500ml misty-bottle. Lift the plants up and thoroughly spray the undersides of leaves as well as the upper surface. Kendon Triforene is the spray we have always used and found effective. Other brands of Triforene are now on the market and we need more information on them. Wettable sulphur is also used to control mildew but will leave a heavy residue which will make the plants unsightly for some time.

LOOPERS: Hungry, destructive little beasts and nearly always prefer the tender new leaves. For the grower with a small number of plants, thumb and finger is a pretty deadly treatment but unfortunately the newly-hatched creatures are very tiny and usually gravitate to the undersides of new leaves where the grower does not see them. The first sign of trouble is the small holes and a new leaf is ruined. A cover-spray is the best insurance. Defender Grasshopper Caterpillar Carbaryl spray is very effective. Dipel will also do the job but the residue will cling to the leaves for weeks so should never be used just prior to a display. Be wary of oil-based sprays. If used during the warmer weather they will burn the leaf edges - including and especially new leaves on rhizomatous.

APHIDS & THRIPS: Like loopers, aphids can be crushed or hosed off but the unhatched eggs remain and perhaps the most damaging aspect is that aphids often carry thrip which we don't see until the damage appears. The first visible sign of an infestation is distorted new leaves. If you turn the leaf over you will probably find adult and many tiny aphids. The thrip are invisible to the naked eye. A systemic spray such as Rogor is needed because it will catch any late eggs hatching. David Gray's Systemic Insecticide granules should also control them.

BEGONIA/CYCLAMEN MITE: These are the most destructive of pests and cause the ugliest damage I have ever seen on a plant. Mites are invisible to the naked eye and usually set up house in embryo buds - flowers & leaves. The first sign is that the plant just stops growing and then gradually produces distorted, blackened leaf and flower buds. The whole growing tip will be affected and the best treatment is to remove the stem back to a healthy side shoot. Mature leaves which are affected will first show a shiny, silvery surface and if turned over the rusty scarring will be obvious where the mites have chewed the surface to get to the sap.

Mites very favourite foods are tuberhybridus & Elatioris. I would suggest if you grow these plants untreated in our climate you WILL have problems.

Their second choice is rhizomatous and calla semps, but they aren't always so choosy and will attack canes & shrub-like. The rusty marking on leaf undersides and damaged main veins are always the clue.

David Gray's Miticide containing Kelthane will kill the adults but the plants would need to be sprayed weekly to catch the babies as the eggs hatch. David Gray's Systemic Insecticide granules is the better treatment. The instructions say it is effective for 6 weeks but allowing a few days for the plant to take up the poison and assuming that the affects would lessen towards the end of that time, I suggest using the granules every five weeks. The hotter and drier the weather the more active mites will be. Ralph Willsmore says wettable sulphur is effective but each growing tip must be saturated regularly and of course it does make an awful mess of the plant.