



BEGONIA SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Growing Begonias

Info. Sheet 3

Watering Begonias

How often shall I water my Begonias? A question so often asked and there is no simple answer. Like all other plants Begonias are watered when they need it. Fortunately a plant's need for water can be assessed by sight or touch unlike problems with P.H. or toxic soil. A caring, observant grower will soon learn to recognise the signs.

There are many conditions which will affect the amount of water a plant requires and how frequently it is required - temperature, humidity, size of plant in proportion to pot size, wind, type of pot (plastic, ceramic, clay), quality of soil.

With low temperatures &/or high humidity the plant will not need to transpire as much moisture to cool and moisten its foliage. In hot or very dry windy conditions the plants will give off and so use much more moisture.

A vigorous plant with a healthy root system will soon fill the soil with roots. Less soil to hold moisture and more moisture needed to service the growing plant. The solution is to place the plant in a larger pot or water more frequently.

When a plant is potted on and so has extra soil or a seedling or freshly rooted cutting is potted up less frequent watering is needed because there is surplus soil to hold the moisture. As the plant grows and the roots fill the pot watering will have to be increased.

The type of container used will make a big difference. Plastic or ceramic pots lose water from the surface soil only, through evaporation and of course that which the roots take up, where as clay pots lose water through the porous clay. Wonderful for keeping the soil and roots cool but demanding in our hot, dry summers. The same applies to hanging containers where fibre liners are used. I use fibre liners because I think they look good and allow good air flow to soil and roots but once the roots have filled the soil they will need extra water. Certainly in our climate they will need watering every day and probable twice on our hottest days.

The quality of soil has a bearing on the amount of water it will retain. Potting mixes which contain animal manure, compost, peat moss, Vermiculite or such will naturally hold moisture longer than those with little humus. Some growers use water crystals or other moisture holding properties to help retain moisture in the soil and this has to be taken into account.

A grower could keep a check list and each morning tot up the points for heat, wind, size of plant, etc, but a loving, observant grower soon gets to know their plants and recognise their needs.

Begonias do require air spaces in the soil to breathe and if these aren't available over a lengthy period, the plant will die. At the same time there must be moisture available which the roots will reach for. So the ideal is to water your plants thoroughly and leave to drain. If the soil is free draining (containing grit, Perlite) and has a proportion of humus (animal manure, peat moss) air spaces will be left between the solid particles as the surplus water drains away while the humus will retain moisture which the roots can use as needed.

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