



BEGONIA SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Growing Begonias

Info. Sheet 6

Winter Care

Because Begonias are not winter-loving plants, our main aim is to provide them with as much warmth, protection and light as is possible.

It is difficult to provide warmth in a shade house; the best we can do is to place the plants up on benches to avoid the sinking, colder air and, wherever possible, in sun-light which is filtered by shade-cloth or fibre glass. The clear plastic seed tray covers are ideal for protecting small plants of distinctive foliage, rhizomatous, or seedlings of any type. They allow optimum light, protection from cold draughts and trap day time warmth. Of course the cleaner and clearer they are, the better, so now is the time to give them a good wash and perhaps rinse in a solution of 1 to 10 household bleach, to deter any nasties.

Small plants in glass closed containers can be brought indoors for the night where it will be a little warmer. Once the morning warms up, they should be moved outside where they can enjoy the days light and warmth. Polystyrene boxes with lids are another way of keeping small plants over the winter. There is some insulation against night temperatures and the closed lids maintain humidity. The plants will probably grow a bit lanky from diminished light, but they will survive, Then there are the large, opaque plastic containers with lids. These will accommodate quite a few small plants and could be brought indoors on extra chilly nights. The cane stemmed, shrub-likes and semi tuberous will most likely shed many of their leaves and some growing tips may die back, but come the warmer weather they are ready to start growing again.

Mildew can be a problem in autumn. The sudden drop in evening temperatures causes condensation to form on the foliage, which provides the ideal breeding grounds for mildew. Because the leaves will be shed anyway, these may as well be removed now. About every alternate leaf and certainly any old, damaged or diseased ones. This will allow more air and light into the centre of the plants to help combat disease. Autumn is the time for a complete cover-spray of fungicide. It is a great mistake to place plants into a closed or semi-closed environment before spraying. The pests and/or diseases will also thrive in the protected conditions. Yates 'Rose Shield' is a combined fungicide/insecticide and so far has caused no damage to Begonias - I am not sure if Tuberous blooms would tolerate it.

By the end of May, the tuberous will have stopped actively growing and it is time to remove all flowers and growing tips to force the nutrients into the tubers. Watering should be limited, to allow the plants to gradually die down. The leaves will start to yellow and segments of the stems will gradually break off. Remove any fallen leaves etc, to limit the breeding-ground for botrytis. Leave the tubers in the mix until the last segment of stem has naturally fallen away. After a week or so, the tuber can be lifted and left on a bench to dry out and the skin to toughen up a bit before the tuber is cleaned.

Watch any large rhizomatous plants, where lower leaves can be shed and perhaps cause rot, which may spread into the rhizome. The grower may choose to remove any lower, older leaves before this can happen.

As the weather cools and plants stop growing, they will require far less water. Only water as necessary to prevent wilting and always early morning, to allow the foliage to dry before evening.

Seed-raising or propagating the more demanding varieties from leaves can make the winter season more interesting. If small closed containers are used, they will fit onto a window-sill and will benefit from light and indoor warmth. A bit slower than summertime propagating, but rewarding.

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