



Prince Edward County Master Gardeners

BEGONIAS

There are two main types of begonias and many colours. Both types are killed by frost but will survive indoors with minimum care. Just pot them up, group them together for humidity, and water if the pots feel light when you lift them. You can add a pinch of fertilizer to the water about once a month or any kind of compost (tea bags, coffee grounds, etc.) By May or June they can go back outside.

Fibrous Begonias have numerous roots growing from the stem. Generally they are under 12 inches in height and are effective as a border or a mass planting. The colour range is white, pink, orange, all shades of red, and some light purple. The flowers are small and numerous. The foliage can be green or bronze. This is the plant often used to depict a Canadian Flag in civic parks.

Tuberous Begonias are big, bold and beautiful. As indicated they grow from a tuber and take a long time to reach the flowering stage, at least 3 months maybe 4. But then the male flower is 3 inches in diameter with 2 companion females. Well worth the wait.

They prefer filtered shade and they are a great plant for entrance pots grouped together, or as an accent in a group planting. They are upright or pendant so when you buy be sure which variety you would like. The colours are much the same as the Fibrous type except some of the Tuberous Begonias have margins of a different colour, and there are spectacular yellows.

According to the catalogues propagating begonias is easy. (Play violins at this point). They require constant temperature (75-77 F), consistent light (15-17 hrs daily), consistent dark (7-9 hrs), high humidity. Possible set-up is a heating pad with a plastic enclosure in an area where the lights are always on in the evening during the winter. According to my secret guru, mist above the planting and allow the damp air to fall. Follow this path for 4 months to develop plants to flowering size. Seeds take longer than tubers. The seeds should not be encouraged to develop tubers until late summer or they will die back. Seeds are as fine as dust so buy them pelleted. Considering the care required the price of nursery plants seems quite reasonable.

Begonias will bloom outside from June until October. They form a four inch root ball so plant them 6" to 8" apart in mottled shade. Do not use soil with polymers. Soak the plants occasionally with tepid water if the summer is dry. Fibrous varieties will be covered with small flowers. Tuberous types can trail over pots or be upright. The WOW factor is very high.

There is also a shrub-type Begonia which is grown for its large leaves in the shape of angel wings. The flowers are inconspicuous but the leaves come in a variety of colours – bronze, purple, mauve, green, all with contrasting veins.

There is more information than you will ever need by searching Begonias on the internet.

Submitted by Joyce Young

For more information contact us at: pecmastergardeners@gmail.com

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