

GROWING BEGONIAS FROM SEED (cont'd..)

This is my method and it works for me, every grower has his or her own method and some will probably disagree with me, but if you like it try it. It is certainly a thrill to watch the tiny plants change as they develop, especially if you don't know what they will look like when they are fully grown.

Good Luck.

BEGONIAS IN BALLAARAT.

(This is the first part of a paper delivered by Philip Clingin, Director of Gardens and Parks, City of Ballaarat, to the second Begonia convention in Perth, 29th to 31st March 1991. The second part of the paper, dealing with recent and projected developments was reported in the May Journal of the Australian Begonia Society. Ed.)

The discovery of gold at Clunes and Ballaarat in 1853 changed forever the future of this district from isolated squatter settlement to, at one stage, the richest urban area in the world. The turbulence, energy and quest for instant riches saw tragedy and conflict perhaps best expressed in the civilian slaughter now known as the Eureka Rebellion on the 3rd of December 1854.

This sacrifice was not without reward, however, as the course for democracy in the colonies was set and a degree of order and permanent wealth settled on Ballaarat as a glittering golden blanket. Majestic boulevards, prestigious homes and a thriving commercial district were to grow from the chaos with the establishment of the Municipal District of Ballaarat on the 18th of December 1855.

BEGONIAS IN BALLAARAT (cont'd..)

By 1858 the municipality was granted 80 acres of land, formerly the police horse paddock beside Yuilles Swamp, for the establishment of the Botanical Garden. To place this in historic perspective this was four years after the Eureka Rebellion. Council actually commenced negotiations with the Colonial government in 1856. How the community's aspirations had changed!

Mr. George Longley was appointed the first curator in December 1858 and, from a tent pitched in the paddock, commenced to implement the plan for the garden selected by a competition won by two local residents Messrs Wright and Armstrong.

Native timber was cleared and development was rapid through to the 1890's that saw the construction of paths, ferneries and nursery. The gardens were blessed by bequests of statues and other ornamentation from wealthy citizens. Obviously both public and private funds were lavished on this land to produce a botanical masterpiece that, together with the adjoining Lake Wendouree (formerly Yuilles Swamp), became the Mecca of weekend leisure for the citizens and all who travelled from far and wide to admire this most obvious statement of community wealth.

The first major conservatory was constructed in 1882 and displays of chrysanthemums, gloxinias, gladioli and geraniums are well recorded and supported by photographic evidence. The burning question remains to this day as to when tuberous begonias were first grown and displayed.

The first official record is from the Curator's log book, 28th September 1898 where it is casually commented that they "potted up tuberous begonias". This is not unremarkable as no doubt the tuberous begonias were only one of many conservatory plants grown and had yet to achieve the prominence they now occupy.

BOTANIC GARDENS: RECENT AND PROJECTED

Director of Gardens and Parks, City of Ballarat

Continuation of the second part of the talk given by Philip at the Begonia Convention in Perth and an article in the City Journal. The first part of his talk was on the history of *Begonia* and will be presented in a future Journal.)

The Begonia Festival was established in 1953. The Festival is now a successful community festival in Australia and contributes a million to the local community annually.

The City of Gardens and Parks Department devotes significant resources to assisting the Begonia Festival Association, as do all the other departments. Gardenfest, a horticultural festival based on the tradition of a floral carpet established during the 1950s, pre-dated the Begonia Festival.

This year's display that, for the first time this year, included a competition between various municipalities to determine who grows the 'best' Begonia. The competition serves to publicize the horticultural assets of this city to the 40 000 visitors to Gardenfest. Also on display was a trophy awarded to the City and Begonia Festival Association to be awarded to the Association of Australian Begonia Societies for the best Begonia. It is anticipated that this will be an annual award that will be given to Association members in their hybridising.

The City of Ballarat and its begonias. From a technical point of view, the method of using terra-cotta pots and loam-based soils is being replaced. In 1989, we now use plastic pots, soil-less potting mix and fungicides. The impetus for this change came from a pressing need to eliminate or control disease and seasonal fluctuations in the quality of the display. Initial results in the first two years are encouraging, but much work remains to be done to dispel the old and to complete implementation of modern nursery practice. The new methods are undoubtedly as three staff are able to

tend up to 3500 begonias each year, compared with 1500 in the past. The begonias are grown under the care and supervision of Wayne Walters, assisted by Myra Grinter and John Head.

New facilities

Another major change in our begonia production was provided by Mother Nature on November 17, 1989, when a dramatic hailstorm destroyed glasshouses dating from 1927. The destruction five months later of the shadehouse through lightning felling a large tree onto it completed the destruction. This caused some embarrassment to the Director of Gardens and Parks, who hadn't been backward in previously advising Council that he felt that the Botanic Gardens Nursery was totally inadequate for its purpose. Comments regarding 'divine intervention' have been heard in the corridors of municipal government!

The destruction provided an opportunity to rationalise the nurseries through the construction of a modern glasshouse. This reconstruction was long overdue as the old nursery had outgrown itself to such an extent that nursery work had descended to a game of chess as stock was constantly moved to make room.

Stage 1 was completed late in 1990, with the construction of:

- a) A 670 m² multispan glasshouse with automatic venting, retractable shading, hailstone protection (!) and rolling benches, primarily for the production of begonias and other 'cold house' crops.
 - b) A controlled hygiene propagation house with island hot beds and mist benches.
 - c) A shadehouse in 'Edwardian Style' for shadehouse plants and hardening off.
 - d) Concrete plant storage bay, etc.
- A quarantine house has just been completed.

Stage 2 (Hopefully to be completed this year.)

A 500 m² multispan hot house for tropicals, begonias other than tuberhybrids and winter conservatory production.

Stage 3. Nursery service area, etc.

Stage 4. Community Resource Centre. It is hoped that this will be the home of local garden clubs and that it will provide a further attraction to the 500,000 visitors to our Botanic Gardens each year.

BALLAARAT BOTANIC GARDENS: RECENT AND PROJECTED DEVELOPMENTS

Philip Clingin, Director of Gardens and Parks, City of Ballarat

(This article is an amalgam of the second part of the talk given by Philip at the Second Australian Begonia Convention in Perth and an article in the City of Ballarat Bulletin. The first part of his talk was on the history of *Begonia* growing in Ballarat and will be presented in a future Journal.)

The Ballarat Begonia Festival was established in 1953. The Festival is now the oldest and most successful community festival in Australia and contributes in excess of \$3.5 million to the local community annually.

The City of Ballarat Gardens and Parks Department devotes significant energy and resources to assisting the Begonia Festival Association, as do all of the Council's various other departments. Gardenfest, a horticultural extravaganza, carries on the tradition of a floral carpet established during floral festivals that pre-dated the Begonia Festival.

The Department mounts a display that, for the first time this year, included a competition amongst various municipalities to determine who grows the 'best' begonias. This competition serves to publicize the horticultural assets of this region of Victoria to the 40 000 visitors to Gardenfest. Also on display was a trophy provided by the City and Begonia Festival Association to be awarded to a member of the Association of Australian Begonia Societies for the best new amateur hybrid. It is anticipated that this will be an annual award that will give real incentive to Association members in their hybridising.

New techniques

Now for the future of Ballarat and its begonias. From a technical point of view, the traditional method of using terra-cotta pots and loam-based soils was followed until 1989. We now use plastic pots, soil-less potting mix and slow-release fertilizers. The impetus for this change came from a pressing need to reduce costs and to eliminate or control disease and seasonal variations in the quality of the display. Initial results in the first two years have been very encouraging, but much work remains to be done to dispel myths and to see the complete implementation of modern nursery practice. The efficiency of the new methods are undoubted as three staff are able to

tend up to 3500 begonias each year, compared with 1500 in the past. Begonias are grown under the care and supervision of Wayne Walt, assisted by Myra Grinter and John Head.

New facilities

Another major change in our begonia production was provided by Nature on November 17, 1989, when a dramatic hailstorm destroyed glasshouses dating from 1927. The destruction five months later of a shadehouse through lightning felling a large tree onto it completed the destruction. This caused some embarrassment to the Director of Gardens and Parks, who hadn't been backward in previously advising Council that the Botanic Gardens Nursery was totally inadequate for its purpose. Comments regarding 'divine intervention' have been heard in the corridors of municipal government!

The destruction provided an opportunity to rationalise the nurseries and the construction of a modern glasshouse. This reconstruction was overdue as the old nursery had outgrown itself to such an extent that the work had descended to a game of chess as stock was constantly moving in and out of the make room.

Stage 1 was completed late in 1990, with the construction of:

- a) A 670 m² multispan glasshouse with automatic venting, retractable shading, hailstone protection (!) and rolling benches, primarily for the production of begonias and other 'cold house' crops.
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Stage 2 (Hopefully to be completed this year.)

A 500 m² multispan hot house for tropicals, begonias other than tuberous and winter conservatory production.

Stage 3. Nursery service area, etc.

Stage 4. Community Resource Centre. It is hoped that this will be a focal point for local garden clubs and that it will provide a further attraction to the 100,000 visitors to our Botanic Gardens each year.

BEGONIAS IN BALLAARAT (cont'd..)

It is obvious that local nurserymen, particularly William Allit in nearby Tyrendarra, had been importing and hybridising tuberous begonias well before 1892. It has been inferred that this nursery was the original supplier to the City but no real records exist to confirm this.

There is no doubt that the City of Ballaarat was actively importing tubers from a new nursery established in Bath, England by 1903. Blackmore and Langdon was established in 1901 and the earliest records were lost during bombing raids of the Second World War. It is clear that from 1903 Blackmore and Langdon became the City of Ballaarat's primary, if not sole, supplier of large flowered hybrids.

Following the death of the first curator, George Longley, in 1899 (after 41 years of service), the gardens operated under two curators (north and south) until the appointment of Thomas Toop, in 1914. Thomas remained in charge until his retirement in 1945 concluding fifty-five years of service to the City.

Thomas Beaumont commenced his service in 1924 as a "lad" gardener under Tom Toop and succeeded him as curator in 1947, a position he retired from in 1978 following 54 years of service.

The gardens, under the care of Thomas Toop and Tom Beaumont, changed to reflect the changed circumstances of the City. The early wealth had disappeared with the discontinuance of mining by the 1920's and Ballarat settled into a secure life supporting the affluent Western District. Funds were not as freely available for municipal endeavours and challenges became the preservation of the historic legacy. Although it is not well recorded, constraints lead to staff reductions and therefore simplification of the gardens. Available labour has shrunk from in excess of twenty gardeners in the early days of Tom Beaumont's employment to the six that currently exist today.

BEGONIAS IN BALLAARAT (cont'd..)

Regrettably the emergence of tuberous begonias as a pre-eminent floral display are not recorded at all. Even the personal recollections of Tom Beaumont fail to address this issue. Any indications discovered are from notations in a visitors book that comment, in 1911, about the spectacular display of tuberous begonias. I would suggest that the cyclic display in the conservatory of begonias, primulas, cyclamen, cineraria and schizanthus are a surviving tradition. The complexity and intensity of the gardens has given way to an arboretum and extensive bedding annual display.

Tom Beaumont recalls that he was first involved in growing the begonias in 1937, after having served thirteen years as a gardener. No doubt he had been selected by Tom Toop as an inevitable successor and the begonia gift was an essential skill to be acquired. The methods by which the begonias were grown, the varieties available at any one time are not recorded and there is limited reference to their culture, primarily from published magazine articles relating to the Ballaarat method.

An article in "Your Garden" in October 1958 best chronicles the methods employed by Tom Beaumont at this time:-

"In late September the tubers should be brought out and started in shallow boxes. Place a layer of charcoal on the bottom of the boxes, then about 1 inch of a compost comprising 2 parts loam and a little coarse sand. Tubers are placed on top of this and

From a political viewpoint, Council is also keen to establish a closer relationship with our Begonia Societies and has offered both financial and logistical support to the Association of Australian Begonia Societies. This builds on the already close relationship established with the Victorian Begonia Society and, if correctly managed and supported from both sides, offers wonderful long-term opportunities.

The future of the City of Ballarat is now inextricably linked with promotion and tourism. Its majestic open space, gardens and horticultural reputation provide what can be a unique asset for the future. There is a dedication to see this asset fostered and promoted and a long-term commitment to see it through. The tuberous begonias and the dedication of the staff involved, supported by Council and the community over the last 90 years, have given something special to Ballarat. This must be the definition of 'flower power'.

(Philip also comments that Ballarat has ignored Ralph Willsmore's hybridising efforts. It has secured some Willsmore varieties through the purchase of a private collection. He concludes: ..its about time we started to include some Australians ..(in) our 2000 little ambassadors that grace the conservatory each year.)

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BEGONIA BOOK OF DAYS

Kit Mounger of the American Begonia Society has made another marvellous contribution to the world of begonias - the Begonia Book of Days. It is a diary, with one week per opening, but undated so that it can be used for any year. But what a diary! At each opening there is a reproduction of one of Kit's marvellous line drawings of a *Begonia*. With the one inside the front cover, that makes almost 60 full page (about A4) drawings. The cover features a water colour of *B. rex*. The SA Begonia Society has ordered 10 copies. The exact cost is uncertain at this stage, but it will be something like \$A23, plus postage from Adelaide for just under 300 grams. Highly recommended. Orders to Barbara Groncki, PO Box 386, Woodville, 5011.

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