

THE BEGONIAS.

The begonia family gets its name from M. Begon, a French Patron of Botany. Some hundreds of species are now recognized.

The first begonia species to be imported into England was *Begonia nitida*, which was brought from Jamaica in 1770, by the 1800's only five had been cultivated. Many species were collected but only in the 1860's were they starting to be hybridized.

Most species are native to South America, but occur in all parts of the world except Europe and Australia.

They were first introduced to England by James Veitch and Sons, the most famous English nursery of the day. They then sent their employee Richard Pearce to Chile, Peru and Bolivia where he collected seed.

In 1864 Pearce sent home his first Begonia species *Begonia boliviensis* which was exhibited at the Paris International Horticultural exhibition. In 1865 Pearce discovered 2 more species, *Begonia pearcii* and *Begonia veitchii*. *Begonia pearcii* is perhaps

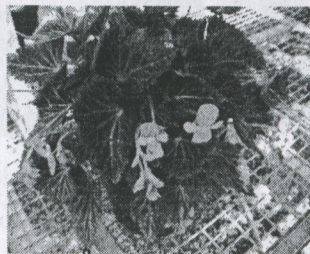
the most directly involved in the pedigree of the modern forms of the upright hybrids. Several other species were later discovered and these were to form the base of the



Begonia boliviensis.

One of the first recorded begonia hybrids raised in the United Kingdom was marketed by Veitch in 1870. The first double begonia was marketed in 1876, 100 years after the first discovery. 1877 saw eleven doubles selling. Among the amateur growers towards the end of the century were Charles Fredrick Langdon and James Barrett Blackmore. Because of their interest in begonias they became friends and rivals and later formed a partnership called 'Blackmore and Langdon of Bath'. This private company continues today and our collection has mainly been imported from them.

Ballarat started growing begonias in approximately 1896. The Ballarat collection comes from stock mostly imported from Blackmore and Langdon (UK) and has been imported on an almost yearly basis since the late 1800's. We now have approximately 3000 tuberous and species begonias in collection. During this display there are approximately 600 begonias on display at one time.



Begonia pearcii.



Robert Clark Horticultural Centre
Ballarat Botanical Gardens

Phone: 03 53205135

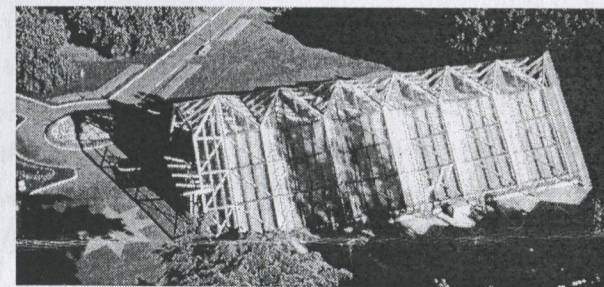
Fax: 03 53203133

Email: rccadmin@ballarat.vic.gov.au

Ballarat Botanical Gardens Robert Clark Conservatory.



**The 2007 Begonia display
March and April**



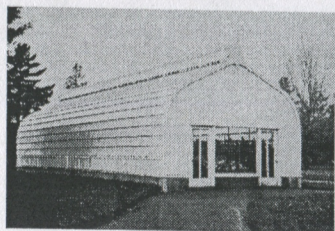
The 2007 Begonia display reflects the three main era's of Begonia displays in the gardens. In its 150th year the Ballarat botanical gardens have been displaying tuberous begonias for over 100 years.

In the early twentieth century the curator John Lingham (1899—1912) managed the north end of the gardens and the south end was managed by Thomas Rooney.

With a glass house at each end, competition arose between the two to create the most spectacular displays. The tuberous begonias became a 'must see' attraction in the newly constructed Keel house. Begonias were also displayed in the south glasshouses until the 1990's.

THE CHANGING CONSERVATORIES IN THE GARDENS.

The Keel House



The 'Keel' house was built in 1906. It was designed in England.

The name was given because its roof resembled that of an upturned hull of a boat. This shape was selected so that snow was shed from the roof easily. It ran in the direction of east to west, and was unheated.

Viewing could only be done from either end looking through the glass. Staff were the only people allowed to enter the building.

In 1934 the southern wall was modified and installed with glass so plants could be viewed better.

The building was fitted with fixed benching so the only difference in displays were the crops used. These included such crops as geraniums, cyclamen, and begonias. It was demolished in 1958.

The Cuthbert Conservatory.

This was opened in 1959, designed by Ballarat architects Lohse and Carruthers. It was built with the help of the state government and the generous Cuthbert family, hence the name.

This too was unheated and ran east to west. It was fitted with fixed benching and only staff were allowed to enter the building.

The difference between the keel house and the Cuthbert was that the displays could be viewed through glass from any position around the building.



It had displays of crops such as coleus, calceolaria, cyclamen, cineraria, primula, schizanthus and the famous tuberous begonias.

It was demolished in September in 1994.

Robert Clark Conservatory.

The Robert Clark Conservatory was opened in 1995, and designed by Peter Elliot. It was funded on a bequest from the grandson of Mr. Robert Clark. Mr. Clark was a co-founder and proprietor of the Ballarat Courier, and his grandson wanted a permanent memorial to him, hence the conservatory was built.

It is different to the old conservatories in many ways

- It runs north to south
- It is heated and air conditioned
- It has automatic misters, vents and blinds so that more climatic control can occur.
- The biggest difference is that people can walk through the building, therefore are able to enjoy and intimate view of delicate blooms.

Displays were once designed by local landscapers but today are designed by the City of Ballarat nursery staff. Many different props are used to create the ever changing display.

There are four different displays every year coinciding with the season. These displays feature crops such as hydrangea, fuchsias, pelargoniums, chrysanthemums, cineraria, cyclamen, primula, schizanthus, and the famous begonias.