

BEGONIAS IN BALLARAT

The first reference found refers to George Longley sticking pieces of "stick" in pots causing the gardener to consider he was going crazy. (Check) Reported to have been imported from England, but, in a letter in Langley's records do not go back to that time to confirm orders to them.

On 15th October, 1925 in a information address to the delegates visiting Ballarat from the Imperial Press Conference in Melbourne the Guide states :- "Included in the Gardens are 8 glasshouses, 4 of which are regularly staged with displays and open to the public, the chief of which is the annual autumn display of tuberous Begonias, some 1500 being grown and generally admitted to be the finest display in the Southern hemisphere."

Bill Greville, who commenced work in the Gardens in 1936 at interviews in 1995 and 2007 recalls that the soil used in potting mixtures came from the sods from the side of the creek on the Common which is now the Wendouree housing estate. The leaf mould used was from the previous year's leaf rakings although all the Oak leaves were retained on their own for the Begonia mixture

Coarse Lal Lal sand was used for all mixtures and the sods of soil which had been stacked several feet high and allowed to mostly dry was chopped down with a mattock so as to retain as much fibre as possible to help keep the soil porous.

The mixture for the Begonias as he recalled were as barrow measurements:-

4 barrows loam

2 barrows of Oak leaf mould

2 large buckets of Lal Lal sand

6 6" pots full of fowl manure

1 shovel full of crushed charcoal (Car charcoal burner type)

The mixture was turned 4 times by shovel and then moistened to the required condition for potting. A small portion of dried hops on top of the crock was placed at the bottom of the pot to prevent the soil from mixing with the crock and ensured good drainage. The hops were delivered from the brewery and spread out to dry.

After the 2nd World War the Gardens were stopped from taking the soil from the Common by the Wendouree Shire and instead took the soil from Greens Lane at Dunnstown. The sods were cut from the creek bed banks which were black and a similar quantity from the rise which was red. Both had high fibre content.

For taking the cuttings from the growing Begonias the best instrument was a surgeon's scalpel (used) collected by Dr Ern Shield from the Hospitals.

He reported that in the glasshouses at the Southern end of the Gardens Single, Crested and Frilled Begonias were grown from seed developing true to type and colour for years.

Later a severe problem with the Begonias developed with the appearance of mildew, eventually traced to a shrub overgrown on the Back Wall. It proved very difficult to control and led to the removal of the Begonias from the Southern glasshouse as the pest was taking up too much time to control.

Jg7/09