

Tuberous Begonia

Cultural Notes

Environment

Sunlight – Choosing the proper environment for Tuberous Begonias is essential. Begonias do best in partial shade or filtered light. The right amount of light is often the key to success. Exposure to excessive sunlight results in burnt flowers and leaves – too much shade results in foliage that is very lush with few flowers.

The more sunlight Tuberous Begonias receive without burning the larger and more abundant the flowers will be. Places like cool greenhouses and shade houses are ideal.

Wind – Some protection from wind is essential. Begonias are quite succulent and can be damaged by strong winds. Light winds are however beneficial.

Starting Tubers

Tubers are started in September to October – it is important that a sprout or pink eye appears before it is planted (a bit like a dahlia). If your tubers are slow to start then move them from their cool winter storage to a warm light place. Always plant with the sprout uppermost. Young tubers seem to give quicker results.

Place the tubers in a pot just large enough not to touch the sides, and just covered by mix.

Water carefully but thoroughly so that the media is fully moist. Do not over-water, as the tubers grow better on the drier side, and should never be left in wet soil for any length of time, otherwise the tuber will rot.

Place the pots in a warm place where it receives filtered sunlight. A temperature of 15-22°C is ideal. However, the cooler the tuber is grown the stronger the root system will be, and the greater the amount of blooms later in the season.

The tuber should not be watered again until the surface of the soil begins to show dryness. As the plant develops, it will require more water, but remember the majority of tubers are lost through over watering than any other cause.

Potting On

The potting mix should be a good open mix; a quality commercial mix having the Australian Standard is usually quite satisfactory. Debco is used by the City of Ballarat. Slow release fertiliser should be added to the mix every 5-6 months to provide the plant with the micronutrients needed.

In December, re-pot the plants into containers approximately 5cm larger using the same mixture as before. Allow the plants to have 1-2 stems, the excess stems can be used as cuttings. Disbud plants as they grow, and place a stake early in the growth. As Begonias are a one way facing plant, the stake should be placed at the back.

Fertilising

Begonias do not require much fertiliser until they are in their final pots. Some liquid feeding may be needed during the flowering season.

Pests & Diseases

Tuberous Begonias are relatively free of injurious pests or diseases. Baiting can control snails, slugs and earwigs. Powdery mildew is the most serious problem you will encounter, which can be overcome by giving the plants adequate air circulation, or

swabbing the leaves with a piece of cotton wool dipped in methylated spirits. White or paler colours seem to be the most affected.

Handle all fungicides with great care and always read the label.

Growing On

As the Begonias in the pot develop, disbud the early flowers together with the two female flowers growing at the side of the larger male flower, unless you want to hybridise and collect seeds. You should remove the flower buds up to the middle of January, this way the later flowers are much larger. With the pendula varieties, it is better to leave all the flowers for a better display.

Resting Period

In late autumn, withhold water and remove all flowers and growing tips. This will commence the dying back process, or dormancy period. Begonias are like all other tuberous or bulbous plants, in that the strength of the tuber is dependent on the slow die back. Eventually the stem will die back completely and fall off. Store the tubers in a frost-free, dark, dry and cool place during the cold winter months.