

Weed seeds; copious amounts can be wind borne.

Suitable site; this method depends on a suitable site and suitable climatic conditions.

PROPAGATION OF VARIOUS TYPES OF BEGONIA

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More than 900 species of the genus *Begonia* are known, coming from the tropical regions of Asia, Africa and the Americas. Begonias were first discovered in Mexico in 1649 by Father Franz Hernandez and first collected in 1690 by Charles Plumier, a Franciscan monk botanizing in the West Indies. The genus was later named after Michael Began, governor of Santa Domingo, who sponsored Plumier's expedition.

For horticultural purposes the genus is divided into four main sections: Fibrous, Bulbous, Tuberous, Rhizomatous.

FIBROUS BEGONIAS

Perhaps the most important of this group is *Begonia semperflorens*, which is used extensively for bedding and pot culture, and is available in a large range of foliage and flower colours.

They are generally raised from seed or stem cuttings, the latter being taken from new shoots produced around the base of the old flowering stems. (This growth is encouraged by cutting plants back in late winter.) Cuttings root readily in an open medium with bottom heat of 15°C and we carry the plants over to the following season.

Larger growing cane types of fibrous begonias are usually propagated by cutting up sections of the cane but I prefer tip cuttings of the young growth as these root more readily (2-3 weeks) and produce more vigorous plants.

As seed is extremely fine, care is necessary when sowing and even those with a steady hand and good eyesight may find mixing it with fine silver sand an aid. We sow in winter, from June to August, under glass, in boxes or, preferably, pots, using John Innes seed compost with finely sieved sphagnum as a topping. Pots should be well watered before sowing and the seed is spread sparingly on top — not covered. They are then covered with a sheet of glass and shaded from the sun. Germination occurs in 10-14 days and at this stage we apply a liquid feed to give plants

an early boost. Pricking out is done into a modified John Innes mix consisting of 7 parts loam, 3 parts sand, and 3 parts leaf-mould. To this is added per bushel 1½ oz. superphosphate, 1½ oz. hoof and horn, ¾ oz. sulphate of potash, and ¾ oz. lime.

If grown as bedding plants they are planted out at 9" spacings in late spring (October-November) and they flower 16-18 weeks after seed sowing.

BULBOUS BEGONIAS

Begonia socotrana is one of the most important in this group, being used as a parent for hybridising a range of winter-flowering forms. Increase is by the bulbils or resting buds formed at the base of the plant.

Begonia dregei X *B. socotrana* produced the Lorraine types, of which 'Gloire de Lorraine', developed in 1892 is the best known and is propagated by seed (when available) or by cuttings.

TUBEROUS BEGONIAS

This is, perhaps, the most popular group and certainly the most admired because of the large flowers in a wide colour range. The three main groups are *B. Tuberhybrida*, *B. multiflora* (smaller and more compact growing) and *B. Pendula*, or basket types.

Propagation is by tuber cuttings or seed, of which named cultivars are available from seedsmen, such as Blackmore and Langdon. Tuber cuttings are made in early spring, the new growths being broken off the tubers and rooted up in a sand/pumice mix on bottom heat. Seed is sown in winter from June to September and, while flowering can be attained in one year, we prefer growth to go into the tuber for overwintering, letting the tuber flower the following season. John Innes compost is again used and tubers only repotted as required prior to flowering in January.

RHIZOMATOUS BEGONIAS

In this group belong many cultivars grown for their attractive foliage, by far the most popular being *B. masoniana* 'Iron Cross' and *B. Rex*. While many in this group can be grown from sections of the rhizome or from seed (when available), the most popular form of propagation is by leaf cuttings. A mature leaf is usually cut up into triangular sections 1.5cm x 1.5cm, including one vein. These sections are inserted vertically into the propagating medium of sand, pumice, or sphagnum and will form roots in three to four weeks if placed on bottom heat. An alternative method is to lay the entire mature leaf on to the moist medium, using pebbles to hold the leaf flat. Plantlets form at the main veins where the leaf has been slashed. Yet another method, not often used, is to plant the mature leaf complete with leaf stalk, young plantlets forming around the base of the leaf.