

Cultural Details: **Begonia**

Begonia semperflorens has waxy foliage and flowers, and is a popular bedding plant, with tolerance of hot and cool weather. It will flower until the first frosts of Autumn.

Begonia tuberous types have large, generally double blooms in a much wider colour range. They are used for formal bedding, Summer pot plant sales, and in hanging baskets. Again, weather tolerance is excellent. In the Winter they will form tubers to survive the Winter once the foliage dies off, but are generally grown as annuals.

Variety Selection

Moles Seeds has a large range of green- and dark-foliaged *semperflorens* begonias, for sales of flowering plants in the pack. Larger-framed varieties such as the Party series can be planted at lower densities in bedding displays. Double-flowered types such as Queen make good pot bedding items.

Begonia Dragon Wings makes a spectacular container plant, requiring at least five, generally six, months to reach a good flowering size.

Amongst the tuberous types, Nonstop is the standard bedding series, joined recently by the 'On Top' series. Both are also grown as pot plants. The Panoramas have a semi-trailing habit for container plantings. The Illuminations are true trailers, for mixed hanging baskets, window boxes etc.

Begonia Elatior is popular, generally vegetatively-propagated, pot plants. Charisma is a high quality seed-raised version, which can be grown similarly to the tuberous types, but sowing 2-3 weeks earlier.

Programming the Crop

Sow tuberous varieties in December-early January, for sales late May-July, and *semperflorens* types January-March for bedding sales May-June.

Propagation and Growing-on

Sow the tiny seeds (70,000 per gram) onto the surface of a free-draining, open, seed sowing compost, which should be thoroughly wetted with a suitable fungicide prior to sowing (to prevent damping-off diseases), and the trays allowed to drain. Seed can be mixed with a little silver sand to make even sowing easier. Cover trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible. Pelleted seed is available for sowing into plug trays; this allows easier sowing and placement of the seed – full details in the catalogue. Light will improve germination (10 hours at

10 ftc (108 lux) is sufficient). Germination takes around 14 days at 21-24°C. Keep the germinating seedlings moist at all times.

After around 5 weeks the temperature can be reduced to around 18-20°C. Growth is very slow in the early stages, and supplementary lighting rigs are advisable to provide 'assimilation lighting' for more rapid early growth, particularly with the earlier-sown tuberous varieties. Where the daylength is shorter than 12 days, young tuberous begonias will begin to form little tubers, which slows growth, so use the lights to extend the daylength, or to interrupt the night period for a few hours.

Tuberous types should be moved on into large cell trays when large enough to handle (after around 7-8 weeks), and grown on for around 6 weeks before being planted into 10cm pots, or 4-pack trays for bedding sales, or into baskets where required. Semperflorens can be pricked out straight into a 6-pack tray for bedding plant sales, or into large plugs first to use less glasshouse space. Grow both types on at around 18-20°C, hardening off the plants prior to sale at around 10-15°C for a couple of weeks. Liquid feed regularly with a relatively weak liquid feed, from seedling to finished plant.

Growth Regulators

Growth regulators can be used (according to the manufacturers' guidelines) on Begonias to ensure a compact habit where required for pack production

Pest and Disease

Maintain good air movement through the crop, and water in the morning rather than the evening to keep the foliage dry and lessen attack by Botrytis. Pay good attention to glasshouse hygiene, using only fresh trays, pots, compost, water and clean bench tops to avoid damping-off diseases, and check for the presence of pests such as aphids, whitefly, spider mites and thrips, spraying accordingly. Powdery Mildew may affect the crop – monitor for white patches on leaves. Do not over-water the crop.

Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.