



VICTORIAN BEGONIA SOCIETY Inc No.A0018681J

Newsletter July/August 2020

Volume 33 Issue 4

Website: begoniasvictoria.org

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Next Meeting

The meeting that was to be held on July 18th has been cancelled. We are hoping we will be able to hold our September meeting (Saturday 19th) with Lynsey Poore agreeing to speak providing we are able to meet then. Her illustrated talk will be "Travels and Begonias from the U.K. to Paris to Costa Rica to Singapore"

Meantime keep safe and we'll see you all then.

Begonia News from Wayne

Hi everybody. I hope you are well—if not get well soon.

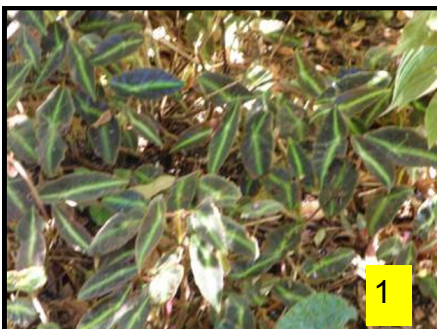
It has been a trying time for everyone not having any meetings or contact with people but we hope it will not be long until we can meet again.

Your tuberous begonias should be in storage by now. I always leave mine in a pot in a cool spot and do not water them but keep checking them because of rodents that like to chew on them. Now is the time to clean your benches and tables for next season. If you take the tubers out of their pots, store them in a box after cleaning them and fill the boxes with vermiculite. Place the tubers in the box after cleaning the tubers up first and sprinkle with a bit of sulphur and cover with vermiculite. Place the label in with the tuber. Check the box every couple of weeks for rot and if a tuber starts to rot pull it out and throw it in the rubbish bin. The soil from the pots can be spread over the garden beds.

Your species begonias should be kept dry with the dead leaves picked up from the pot and thrown away in the garbage bin.

Take care everybody

Di and Wayne



Name these begonias from the website.

ROYAL ACCOLADES

OR HOW CHARLES PLUMIER DISCOVERED BEGONIAS. Peter Sharp

Michel Begon, remembered in the name of the family *Begoniaceae*, was a distinguished French senior public administrator, a patron of the Arts and Sciences and greatly esteemed by King Louis XIV. He was, between 1682 and 1685, *Intendant* (or Governor) of the French Antilles, comprised of the Islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Saint Christophe. On his recall to France in 1682 he was appointed *Intendant* of the Marseilles Galleys, a posting which he did not relish, and his appointment to the *Intendancy* of the important seaport and naval base of Rochefort in September of 1688 was no doubt a great relief, and indeed a significant promotion. It is to him that we are, indirectly, indebted for the discovery of the Begonia.



Louis XIV, the Sun King, reigned in France for 72 years from 1643 to 1715. He was, amongst many other things, an active patron of the Arts and Sciences. Botany was one of his many interests and in early 1688 he required Michel Begon, who at that point was *Intendant* of the Marseilles Galleys, to recommend a suitable person to undertake a plant collecting trip to the French Antilles.

The man Begon chose for the expedition was a physician and botanist, Francois Surian, who then selected as his assistant a Franciscan monk, Charles Plumier, who was skilled in botany and botanical illustration. They set out in 1690 and went about their botanical collecting in the plant-rich islands of the Caribbean. An unrecorded incident which strained the relationship beyond endurance resulted in Surian and Plumier parting company, but each carried on botanising. Surian's considerable manuscripts are held in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris, but it is Plumier who is best remembered for his discoveries, amongst which were six species of a hitherto unknown plant family which he called *Begonia* in honour of the man who had recommended Surian to King Louis XIV. It is reported that Plumier sent Begon many interesting plants during this first expedition, for Begon was an avid collector of items of a scientific or botanical nature. These gifts, and a continuing correspondence, resulted in Plumier coming under Begon's patronage for future expeditions. The *Begoniaceae* was officially recognised in 1700 by Joseph Pitton de Tournefort in his book '*Institutiones Rei Herbariae*' Vol I, and later by Carl Linnaeus in 1753 in his '*Species Plantarum*'.

Plumier made detailed notes and drawings of all his discoveries but alas, his plant specimens never reached Paris, for he was shipwrecked on the way home. His notes he managed to save and these are stored in the same National Library as Surian's. Plumier was awarded the accolade of '*Botaniste du Roi*' for the amazing work he carried out, for on this and two subsequent expeditions between 1690 and 1704 he discovered hundreds of new plant families in the Americas. In all he produced three major works and some 31 manuscript volumes of drawings and descriptions, a truly extraordinary achievement when one considers the dangers he faced, the difficulties under which he doubtless worked and the shipwrecks he survived. Plumier was a man of many talents who added immeasurably to our knowledge of the natural world and well and truly deserved the title of '*King's Botanist*'.

Plumier is credited with instituting the charming custom of naming new plant families after notable persons and amongst his discoveries he named *Magnolia* for Pierre Magnol, Director of the Montpellier Botanic Gardens, and *Fuchsia* for a noted German botanist Leonard Fuchs, and many more. His only mention in the floral pantheon is in the name *Plumieria* bestowed in his honour on the Frangapani, and in one species of begonia, the shrub-like *B. plumieri*.

The City of Rochefort maintains and operates a great conservatory housing a significant collection of the rarest species of the *Begoniaceae* in honour of Michel Begon who is greatly revered for his work as *Intendant* of Rochefort-sur-mer. In 1694 his *Intendancy* was extended to include the whole of the newly declared Province of La Rochelle (which included Rochefort), and he was virtually the absolute master of the area with the Naval Commandant filling a secondary role. As with Plumier, Louis XIV accorded him an accolade, describing him as "*le meilleur Intendant de Louis XIV*" (Louis XIV's best *Intendant*). He died in office in 1710 having spent 21 years administering the affairs of this great seaport and province.

(Note - I am indebted to Patrick Rose of the Rochefort Begonia Conservatory for much of the information regarding Michel Begon.) ■

Illustration from 'Tuberous Begonias. Origin and Development' by J. Haegeman

Sourced from Begonia Australis June 2011

Mildew Kevin Handreck

Some begonias are attacked by mildew: others are not. Some growers have more problems than others. Mildew problems are worse in some years than others. Have you ever wondered why there should be these variations?

First, let us look at the "disease triangle" - a pillar of all studies of diseases. The "triangle" states that for any living thing to have a disease there must be a disease-causing organism (a pathogen), a suitable living thing to attack (a host), and the right conditions for attack to take place and be successful.

Pathogens

Mildews are caused by the spores of a number of different fungi. There is usually no shortage of these spores in urban environments, as they are easily blown from property to property, Some of them are probably sitting on the page you are now reading. Almost certainly others will be on the leaves of your begonias, and on surfaces in their general surroundings.

With spores everywhere, does it make any sense to remove diseased leaves and to keep your begonia houses as clean as possible? The answer is a big YES. The reason is that while a plant may resist attack by a few spores, a large number arriving at one time can overwhelm its defenses. Keeping the spore population as low as possible is a key part in minimizing mildew attack.

A susceptible host

Begonias such as *B. sutherlandii*, *B. dregei*, and *B. 'Looking Glass'* are renowned for getting mildew in massive doses. These are susceptible hosts for the mildew causing fungi.

Other begonias, such as *B. hydrocotylifolia*, *B. egregia*, *B. 'Fairyland'*, and *B. 'Sisquoc'* seem generally to be immune to attack by mildew, even though they may be sitting right beside a plant that emits clouds of spores as soon as it is touched. They have some way of resisting attack. perhaps through having thick skins. a dense covering of hairs on their leaves, or chemicals in their leaves that inhibit the spores or kill the fungal strands that grow from them.

If we are sick of removing leaves killed by mildew and sick of looking at the mess mildew can make, we can:

- Grow only those plants that are resistant to attack;
- Spray repeatedly to kill spores in the air; or

Consider the third side of the disease triangle, and provide conditions that prevent the fungal spores from germinating and growing,

Environment

Prevention is easy to write about, but I have found it hard to put into practice. Some idea of what we have to achieve can be had from considering the conditions needed for mildew spores to germinate.

Water is essential. That means water on the surface of the leaves. That water doesn't have to be present in drops. The thinnest of films is enough for fungal spores. The amount of moisture that is left on a mirror if you breathe lightly on it is enough to allow germination of powdery mildew spores.

The water must be present for from 1 to 10 hours. Powdery mildew spores germinate on leaves that are damp for about 1 hour. Downy mildew spores need several hours of dampness.

The temperature must be just right. Some spores germinate only when there has been a sudden drop in temperature. Such a temperature drop usually allows water vapour in the air to condense on leaf surfaces. so producing the conditions needed

And for the technically minded with plenty of money

- On clear nights, draw night curtains over the plants to reduce loss of heat from the leaves by radiation.
- If possible, slightly heat the air on nights when condensation would otherwise occur ■

Sourced from *Begonia Australis* 1992, *The Begonian* Jan/Feb 1993

Pruning *Begonia* 'Dragon Wings' N.L.Gerraty

Begonia 'Dragon Wings' is a recently developed hybrid begonia, that has increased in popularity due to its long flowering season (often 12 months or more as a pot/tub specimen), with showy red or pink flowers on upright canelike stems, and dark green glossy leaves. It is a fertile hybrid developed by Patrick Worley (unconfirmed), between an unknown (unnamed) *B.semperflorens* and a canelike orange flowering species from Argentina(known as U 014). The name "Dragon Wings" was selected by the commercial nursery who secured the marketing rights. (from the Begonian - July/August 2006 - p30).

'Dragon Wings' is grown from seed, and is readily available from commercial outlets as established plants with large dark green glossy leaves on fleshy cane-like stems, with bright pink or red single flowers from the leaf axils. The terminal shoot continues to produce the flower bearing leaf nodes for many months, hence the extended flowering season.

Little has been written on the long term management of the plant, and over time the plant will produce somewhat smaller leaves and flowers, although still a showy plant specimen. There inevitably comes a time to rejuvenate the plant by pruning and repotting, and the procedure to follow is similar to the pruning of semps i.e. hard pruning back to the basal leaf axils that have lateral shoots rather than flowers.

The following photos will help to explain the pruning steps necessary for good recovery of the plant.

Photos 1 & 2 (plant before commencing / close up of typical cane) Note the canes have flowers/dead flower petioles at all leaf axils, and the plant will not develop lateral growths from any of these nodes. (cuttings taken from these stems might strike, but will not produce a nice bushy plant)

Photo 3 - shows removal of the dead canes as a first step in cleaning up the plant.

Photo 4 - (plant partly pruned) - note that the flowering canes are cut back to the lower leaf axils, where lateral shoot growth is clearly evident. Continue pruning until all canes are cut down to this level.

Photos 5 & 6 -(plant fully pruned / side view / looking down onto plant) - note plenty of new shoots to rebuild the plant for the coming season.

Photo 7 - four pruned and repotted plants - these were potted back to a size smaller pot, and will be potted on later as required ■

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2



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4



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