



# VICTORIAN BEGONIA SOCIETY Inc No.A0018681J

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President	Vice President	Secretary/Editor	Assistant Secretary	Treasurer
Wayne Walters 14 Orion Street Sebastopol 3356 Ph. 03 53356497	Michael Williams 106 Timboon Curdie- vale Rd. Timboon 3268 Ph. 03 55983842	Peter Carter 807 Winter Street Buninyong 3357 Ph. 03 53413545 <a href="mailto:pcarter@netconnect.com.au">pcarter@netconnect.com.au</a>	Kathy Williams 106 Timboon Curdievale Road Timboon 3268 Ph. 03 55983842	Margaret Fennon 6 Irrewillipe Road Elliminyt 3250 Ph. 03 52321340 <a href="mailto:billfennon37@gmail.com">billfennon37@gmail.com</a>

## Next Meeting

The meeting that was to be held on September 19th has been cancelled as the meeting room will not be available and coronavirus restrictions are expected to be still in force. Lynsey Poore's illustrated talk "Travels and Begonias from the U.K. to Paris to Costa Rica to Singapore" has been tentatively pencilled in for our May meeting in 2021.

At this stage we are hoping to be able to meet on Saturday 21st November for our AGM and Christmas meal.

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

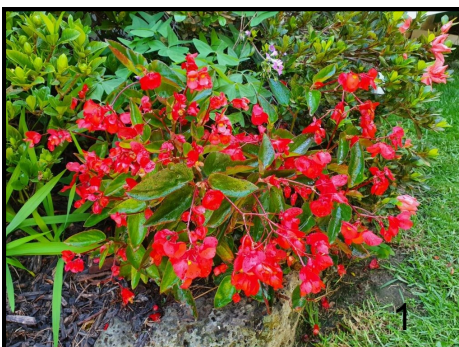
## News from Wayne

Hi everybody we hope you are all well and if you are sick get well soon.

Now is the time to start your begonias off. When you take your begonias out of the pots knock off all of the old soil and the old roots. Check the tubers for rot and cut out any rot. Sprinkle the cuts with a bit of Bricky's lime. The same principle applies for the begonias that have been placed in boxes. Also check for any weevils. If the tubers are nice and clean then pot them into smaller pots—4" or 5" - but don't over-pot them. Use a good potting mixture. Then put them in the glass house and give a light watering until they start to shoot. The main thing after potting is to put in the correct labels to each pot. The pots have to be cleaned before use and have a clean glasshouse too. The same thing goes when you start potting your species begonias.

We hope this finds you all well in this lock-down period.

Take care everyone until we meet again. Happy Fathers' Day.



Name from our website



## Plumier's Half Dozen Peter Sharp

Charles Plumier, in the year 1690. travelled to the French West Indies on a voyage of botanical discovery, having been charged by his Sovereign Louis XIV through the direct mandate of Michel Begon. then Intendant of the Galleys in Marseilles and later to become Intendant of the City of Rochefort. to search for new plant species in the region. Plumier was originally working with a physician, Francois Surian, whose expedition this originally was. However, Surian seems to have been pushed aside in some manner, doubtless through a falling out of some sort, and Plumier became the principal figure in the botanical discoveries which followed. Surian continued to botanise and there is a large collection of his work in Paris.



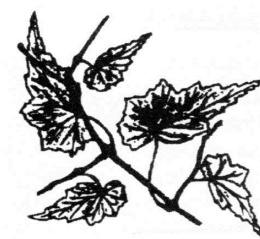
*Begonia macrophylla*

Plumier set about his search for new plants in the French Antilles, exploring the island of Martinique, and in the present day Haiti. which is the western portion of the island discovered by Christopher Columbus and named by him Hispaniola. Haiti in Plumier's time was a nominal French possession, although rightfully Spanish. having been occupied by French buccaneers who used it as a base for their depredations in the Caribbean. The eastern half of the island is today the Dominican Republic but when Plumier visited it was a Spanish possession. At that time Spain and France were at war so that Plumier was not able to explore the eastern half of Hispaniola.

Plumier discovered, amongst many other things, a round half dozen plants of a new genus and he named it after his patron Michel Begon, Begoniaceae. It is interesting to note that Plumier began this now commonplace custom of naming plant genera after people. He recorded the results of his explorations in several books. He also produced a considerable number of illustrated manuscripts of which the most important is "Botanicum Americanum seu historia plantarum insulis mascentium" (1697). This work is preserved in the Biblioteque Centrale du Museum d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris.



*Begonia brachypoda*



*Begonia plumieri*



*Begonia repens*

It is unfortunate that there are no extant botanical specimens of Plumier's discoveries as he apparently endured several shipwrecks during his voyages home from the Caribbean and his specimens were lost. However, he was a most exacting collector and has left in his books and manuscripts drawings of all his discoveries. Of the six begonias he discovered we know the modern names of 5, but the sixth seems to have been lost. These six begonias are named and described in the above mentioned manuscript and are as follows:

1. *Begonia purpurea maximo, folio aurito* — now *B. macrophylla* Lam = **obliqua** Linnaeus
2. *Begonia roseo flore, folio aurito minor et glabra* — now *B. brachypoda* Schultz
3. *Begonia roseo fore. folio aureta, minor et hirsute* — now *B. repens* Lamarck
4. *Begonia roseo flore, foliis acutioribus, auritis et latius crenatis* — now *B. plumieri* A. DC. var. **plumieri**
5. *Begonia roseo flore. folio orbiculari* — now *B. rotundifolia* Lamarck
6. *Begonia nivea et rosea maxima folio aurito* — now unknown



Now unknown

According to Haegeman. *Bs. brachypoda, repens, rotundifolia* and *plumieri* were discovered by Plumier on Haiti. and *B. macrophylla* on Martinique. He also notes that Linnaeus grouped all the begonias discovered by Plumier under the single name of *B. obliqua*.

### References:

1. 'Tuberous Begonias: Origin and Development' by J. Haegeman 1979.
2. Short biography of Michel Begon by Patrick Rose 1998.
3. 'Begoniaceae Edition 2' by Golding & Wasshausen. Smithsonian Institution 2002. ■

*Begonia rotundifolia* This article sourced from *Begonia Australis* June 2010 and December 2000

The sketches were traced from photocopies of illustrations drawn by Plumier and included in his manuscript "Botanicum Americanum"

**Why prune Begonias?** Mainly to stimulate fresh, vigorous growth and perhaps to aim for a more pleasing shape. If left not pruned, the existing stems (of cane-like begonias) will continue to slowly grow. The old leaves will be shed and replaced by mediocre ones. Where flowers have been produced in leaf axils, very few begonias will have growth buds, so the likely result will be a length of bare stem. Not a pretty sight. When a stem is pruned back to a node with a healthy growing tip, the energy and nourishment is forced into this shoot and it will soon develop a fresh stem.

Another reason for pruning is to remove unhealthy, unsightly or spindly growths. Usually unsightly and unhealthy go together and it is rare for two-year-old stems to be attractive. These should be removed at soil level or down to the lowest growing tip. This is when the plant is encouraged to produce fresh subterranean growths, which will emerge as basal shoots. Spindly growths are neither of use to plant nor to grower and can be great disease havens. Just get rid of them.

So we are left with a plant devoid of old, mature growth but hopefully with two, three or more healthy stems from the last one or two season's growth. If these are vigorous basal shoots they will grow rapidly and perhaps give the plant an unbalanced appearance (especially the superba canes). They can be cut back by about half to a growth bud, which should slow their growth to match the rest of the plant. Usually, the tall growing varieties, when pruned, will not bush out below the cut, but will continue to grow a single stem. Nearly always where the new stem has emerged from the old, there will be two growth buds and if the grower has the courage and time, these can be forced into growth by severely pruning back the single fresh stem. The advantage being more growths and foliage. The intermediate and dwarf canes, shrub-like and semi-tuberous will usually branch out readily from the lower stem when pruned, making multiple branches. Most of these types are suitable for hanging containers.

**Why do we prune in early spring?** To take advantage of the energetic sap flow caused by higher temperatures and longer daylight hours. Most of the intermediate and dwarf canes, shrub-like and semi-tuberous will grow and bloom early in the season and may require tip pruning later in the season to maintain a pleasing shape. Some of the tall growing canes take much longer to produce blossom — maybe a full growing season — so to enjoy autumn blossom it is necessary to prune early.

Of course, pruning alone will not cause the plant to produce its best growth. It must be repotted into fresh, good quality mix. If the root-ball needs reducing, doing so will cause it to make fresh, healthy roots. To complete the job, and to get the best results, the plant needs food. We recommend a suitable amount of slow-release fertilizer and in addition liquid and/or foliar feeding until the plant is beautifully regrown. Continued liquid/ foliar feeding is the grower's choice.

The upright tuberous are not pruned. The pendulas can be tip pruned to encourage more side branches. The rhizomatous are pruned if necessary as flowering finishes ■

*Sourced from a Western Australian Society newsletter*

### **Spring Check Up** Tricia Marriott

Spring is really the busiest time of the year. Not only do people feel stimulated with the warmer weather and the invigorating effect of sunshine, our plants (and pets ) also react. Time to get busy.

Close inspection of individual pots is a must and a variety of jobs may need doing.

**Repotting** — may include a complete replacement of growing mix or removing some of the mix and refreshing by adding new material and carefully mixing it in around the edges and the top. Letting some fresh air in also helps. Don't forget to move on the plants' nametag. Some plants may need pruning ..

**Resizing** — This may be potting up or down depending on the health of the plant. A depleted or fragile plant may need some old or tatty leaves removed before gently repotting into a smaller pot for recovery.

**Spraying** — surface or systemic as needed. Not every plant needs it. But this is grub season.

**Fertilizing** — Less is better than more to safeguard tender roots, especially if you have not been feeding at all for a lengthy time. Read instructions carefully. It is often better to halve strength and feed more regularly. Vary the feed given at times. Gloves and a mask may be advisable.

**Cleaning** — Remove all old, damaged, rotting materials. Clean up benches and pots.

**Pruning** of mature plants is best done at least a couple of weeks before repotting. This way the parent plant will be stimulated by fresh mix and feeding and send out new growth (and better shape) that will not then be removed by pruning. When pruning, try to keep foliage and root sizes in balance (unless cutting back *Semperflorens*). Cuttings can be settled into small pots to establish.

**Foliar Feeding** - It is recommended to foliar spray early in the morning. This is especially important during the cooler seasons of autumn, winter and spring. However, our yo-yo-ing weather can make life a little more difficult at times. Leaves will have time to dry off before evening chill sets in and so discourages mildew and wilt. Fungus and insecticides can usually be mixed with fertilizer so saving you time and energy. Ensure that soil gets a good wetting between-times so roots don't dry out.

**Checking Root Systems** - It is easy to check if you are not sure that a plant needs to be repotted into a larger sized container. Just remove the whole plant carefully from the pot without disturbing the soil ball. A visual check will then tell you if the roots are thickly circling around inside the pot and clearly in view. Don't disturb the roots any more than you have too, then pot up ■

*Sourced from MBS News August 2012*



### WHAT MAKES A QUALITY BEGONIA? Mike Stevens

Why is it that 'Named Begonias' are considered to be superior to the run of the mill plants grown in people's gardens, the Creme de la Creme if you like.

When placed side by side it can be said that both originated from a seed, the better quality plants as a result of a controlled hybridization programme, the others probably from more haphazard pollination. This is not to say that good plants do not come about in this way - they do, but the chances are drastically reduced.

The seedlings from a controlled programme are grown and flowered in a controlled environment. A small number of these may be selected as 'possibles', to be grown again the following season. An example of this process comes from the Blackmore & Langdon Nursery in England. They grow in the region of 100,000 plants from seed each year and may select only 5 or 6 for continuation in the programme.

Let us now look at what constitutes a good plant and a good flower.

#### First, the plant ...

Begonias are no different from any other plant in so much as their growth needs to be vigorous. This gives the benefits of ease of cultivation and propagation, necessary attributes for any commercial grower and those of us who wish to enlarge the size of our collection or dabble with hybridization. A strong resistance to disease is also important. I am sure you have found through experience that some plants are particularly susceptible to disease, eg. Powdery Mildew, no matter what steps are taken to combat it. Plants such as this should be disposed of and never used for hybridization. Vigour, however, does not mean that a plant should grow to enormous size. Some varieties, eg. *B.* 'Ninette', cannot be put into the vigorous class as they rarely throw any side shoots. However, you can usually guarantee that it will be the tallest plant in the shade house. Its habit is to grow tall unlike *B.* 'Venus', *B.* 'Jamboree' and *B.* 'Jean Blair' which are more compact.



*Begonia* 'Fred Martin'

#### ... then the flower

It is said that "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" and this is certainly true in respect of begonias. Some admire single flowers or those with no formal centre full of pollen. From a personal point of view such flowers would not receive shelf room and would be relegated to the garden. To me a good flower and one to be aimed for is one as described by **Brian Langdon** in his book '**Begonias, the care and cultivation of tuberous varieties**', and I quote:

"There are four things to look for in a high quality begonia flower - **depth** of the flower, **breadth** of the petal, **texture** of the petal and flower **shape**. Thus the flower must have a good depth (from front to rear), preferably about 2.5 cm (1 in) less than the diameter, with individual petals at least 5 cm (2 in) and preferably 7.5 cm (3 in) wide - narrow or pointed petals give a thin mean look to the flower. The texture of the petals must be as heavy as possible - in the sense that silk might be described as heavy. This is a quality difficult to describe but immediately recognisable when one comes across it. The flower should have a good complement of petals, but not appear too crowded. The centre should resemble an opening rose from which the layers of petals gradually blend into one another towards the back of the flower. There should be no marked gaps where some layers have pulled back to leave a gap and give a 'cup and saucer' effect, with the centre of the flower, the 'cup', pointing forward away from the reflexed rear petals, the 'saucer'. Flowers opening to a muddled or multiple centre are not acceptable.

**Size of flower** is also important, but, within limits, must always take second place to quality.

However excellent in other ways, no flower can be considered perfect if it does not possess **good keeping qualities**. The ideal should be that individual flowers should last in good condition until such time as other flowers on the same plant have opened, so that a number may be fully open on the same specimen plant together."



*Begonia* 'Flo Willsmore'

When I first started to grow begonias I had no appreciation of what was a good plant or flower. If it grew well and was colourful it was okay by me. I have learnt a lot since that time, from reading and talking to many people. Please do not feel that this article is denigrating you because you do not grow 'Named Varieties'. Up until now these have been hard to get and generally expensive, and some of course still are. Furthermore many people may prefer to grow garden varieties only, and have wonderful mass displays from these.

One thing I always remember reading, which applies not only to begonias, "**It is just as easy to grow a good plant as a bad one.**"

Sourced from "*Begonia News*" Canterbury Begonia Circle August/September 1994