



VICTORIAN BEGONIA SOCIETY Inc No.A001868¹J

Newsletter March/April 2021

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Meeting Saturday March 13th, 2021

This will take the form of an excursion to two begonia growers in the Timboon area. Starting at 11 am on Saturday, 13th March at the home of Michael & Kath Williams at 106 Timboon Curdievale Road, Timboon, we will have lunch (bring your own) with tea & coffee supplied under the trees. We will also hold our belated AGM !

In the afternoon we will visit Stan & Alma Woolstencroft at 89 Curdies Road, Timboon. There will be plenty of begonias to buy! If you plan on coming please notify Peter (pcarter@netconnect.com.au) by Thursday 11th March to ensure we keep to Covid19 requirements,. There will be no meeting on the 20th March.

A Word from Wayne

Hi everybody. We hope you are well; if not get well soon.

Last month has been a very hard time for the begonias with the weather being cool and then hot. Just what the begonias don't like but we have to battle on.

Watch the watering and watch for mildew.

Your tuberous begonias should be coming into flower now. You can enjoy their flowers seeing there is no competition.

It is a good time to try crossing some begonias to see if you can get some new varieties'

Don't forget to stake your begonia's flowers so they don't drop and break. Later in Autumn remove the flowers so that the goodness goes back into the tuber for next season.

Happy gardening with your tuberous and species begonias

Take care everybody.

Begonia Festival The display of begonias at the Robert Clark conservatory will be on display throughout March and possibly into early April. There will be a "Gardeners' Market" on Saturday, 6th March 12noon to 5pm . While we were offered a site the decision was made not to take up the offer.

Normal March Meeting The Robert Clark Centre where we normally meet was not going to be available again so it was decided to hold the excursion instead. Hopefully we may be able to meet again normally in May.

Changes to our website Go to **videos** under **Cultural Notes** and you will find attached a video produced in 2014 of hybrids produced by Lyla Kilpatrick from Western Australia. There you will find some forty of Lyla's hybrids in Rexes, Shrub-like, Cane-like, shrub and Trailing Scandent. Lyla has been an inspiration for many years in the Australian begonia world especially in Western Australia. We thank her for allowing us to use this video and wish her well in the future.

Coronavirus Restrictions here in Victoria have just been lifted so all are welcome to our excursion. Sounds as though there will be quite a number there. Please wear your name tag as it's a long time since we saw you! Don't forget your lunch!



Taking Cuttings Steve Varga

Thank you for your regular Begonia magazine reports. I read the magazine from cover to cover.

I did read that someone said stem cuttings were difficult to do. So challenge accepted.

I used a stainless steel scalpel with replaceable blade, the type surgeons use.

A nice pink basket variety was chosen. This had 3 side buds. An incision was

made either side of the side stem. A small part of the main stem was removed with the side stem ensuring the node went with the cutting.

The cutting was dipped in Clonex® and then placed in a core of propagating sand and high-quality seed raising mix. This was in a 4 inch pot. The cutting was labelled and dated and then covered with a soft drink bottle base.

Roots formed within 4 weeks and the plant was then transferred to a 6 inch pot.

Flower buds were removed and the plant was allowed to mature through to the end of the growing season. Pictured are the 2 cuttings I did from last year. Next to them on the left is Mamma. She is quite proud of her babies don't you think?

i now need to try this technique on my slightly more fickle tuberous Begonias. That's' if I can find a side shoot.

Regards Steve



Home Remedies

Aphids, Caterpillars and other Insects Add two tablespoons of soap flakes in one litre of warm water and stir thoroughly until completely dissolved. Just spray it on as is.

Fungicide Mix one level teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda in one litre of water. Add one litre of skim milk and a pinch of Condor's Crystals. Shake thoroughly—apply as necessary.

Colin Jennings South Australian Newsletter May 2011

Snail Bait Tips

To deter slugs and snails try mixing one tablespoon of instant coffee with one litre of water. Spray on the floor of the shade house. This is a preventative spray and will last for a time even when hosed down. Later you will need to re-apply.

Coffee grains and/or egg shells also work in deterring slugs and snails.

To remove writing on plant labels

Rub with nail polish remover. Some pen/pencil writing is hard to remove but if you keep on rubbing it should eventually disappear.

South Australian Newsletter February, 2012

Semperflorens means "always flowering". Begonias in the semperflorens-cultorum group are renowned for their spectacular display of colour and ease of growing. They are commonly known as wax or bedding begonias. A distinct advantage is they are sun hardy and can be grown successfully in massed displays or borders in the open garden as well as in pots.

B. semperflorens (*B. cucullata*) was crossed with *B. schmidtiana* in 1878. *B. cucullata* provided the waxy leaf and *B. schmidtiana* the low growing and more compact growth habit. *B. cucullata* was not used again in the development of this group. The seedlings were crossed with each other and *B. schmidtiana*

numerous times with the result that the habits became so well established in some varieties that they come true from seed.

The first bronze/red leaved semp was a mutant which appeared in France in 1890. In 1891, the bronze/red leaved begonia was crossed with *B. schmidtiana* and provided a wider range of low growing forms. Crossing these seedlings with *B. fuchsioides* produced smaller and smoother foliage.

In 1892 a variety with yellow blotched foliage emerged — (the fore-runner of *B. 'Charm'*). In 1900 *B. nitida* was bred into semps, and from this, some double flowered begonias were born. *B. 'Calla Lily'*, a white leafed mutant, appeared in America before 1920 and similar ones occurred voluntarily in European nurseries at this time. Pom-pom like double flowers were introduced in Sweden in 1934 from crossings of semperflorens-cultorum with *B. fuchsioides floribunda*. Helen Kraus was the person who defined the name "Semperflorens-cultorum" in 1945 and so we have the classification today.



Begonia cucullata

Thanks to the good work and perseverance of growers in these early times, we now have semps with green, bronze/red, green/blotched yellow and white variegated leaves. The flowers are white, red, several shades of pink or pink/white variegated and can be double, single or semi-double. Sometimes begonias produce unusual inflorescences. The inflorescence is replaced entirely by a vegetative branch. It occurs in a number of species of begonia but has most often been observed in *B. cucullata*. Some of our long-time members may remember my green double flowered semp. Those little bunches of green flowers did grow into little plants but did not produce the same unusual inflorescence from which they came.

Semperflorens-cultorum grown as garden borders or massed displays are usually planted and looked after like any perennial — just watered and given a bit of fertilizer from time to time — and they do very well. After a lengthy burst of bloom they are cut back, watered and fertilized and they come back beautifully. Grown in pots, it is advisable to pinch out the first flower buds to encourage more branching and so more flowers. The aim is for a well-rounded pot full of lush leaves covered with flowers. If a plant has become leggy, prune the tips out and use them to make more plants. If there are two leaves and a node, it will grow!!

Semperflorens will grow in full sun, semi or full shade but they do require good bright light. Those receiving some direct sunlight will have a stronger more compact plant with vibrant colour in both leaf and flower. Also, there is no problem with mildew when grown with some direct sunlight.

To flower well, they need to be fed well. Calcium enriched water will increase and prolong the flowering period of potted plants. Seedlings are readily available from nurseries and garden centres but in recent times I have not been able to buy seed. Species listed as semperflorens are *B. hirtella*, *B. cucullata*, *B. schmidtiana*, *B. leptotricha*, and *B. subvillosa* var. *subvillosa* ■



Begonia schmidtiana

When setting out to breed some begonias you may or may not have a specific goal that you wish to achieve. There are no rules as to who can or cannot try their hand at hybridizing tuberous begonias whether crossing within the tuberous hybrids or with other species of the begonia family. The possibilities are endless. For now we will talk about tuberous x tuberous crosses. To start the process you will need a female flower and pollen from a male flower. The female flowers are almost always single and can be distinguished by the three lobed swelling at the back of the flower; this is the immature seed pod. There are usually two of these sitting either side of the male flower, this combination of flowers in the modern day hybrids can sometimes have as many as three male flowers with the female flowers with the seed pods on the outside of the outer male flowers. You will also need a male flower that will produce pollen. This can be a problem at times and absolutely impossible with some of the modern highly bred double varieties. Some of these will not produce pollen at all no matter how you may try coaching them. These varieties may be used as the female parent. Some double varieties will produce pollen sacks (anthers) at the end of a long flowering season, probably as a survival process if the plant has been flowering for an extended period of time and the plant is a little exhausted.

Leaving them on the hungry side could help the possibility of the plant producing pollen. Sometimes there may be just one or two anthers hiding in amongst the petals, and other times there will be quite a cluster of anthers or anywhere between the two. One way of forcing a variety to produce pollen is to take cuttings early in the season in 50mm tubes and leave them in that small container until they are quite hungry and stressed and letting them flower as soon as they wish. If this does not work pot them on into a larger container and quite often the sudden surge of nutrients will cause the plants to produce pollen. Another source of pollen is to use plants of a slightly inferior quality which produce semi double flowers, which if crossed with fully petalled flowers usually produce flowers of high quality. Pollen from single flowered varieties is not advisable if you are wanting to produce double flowers as the progeny will most certainly have single or semi double flowers at the very best. There may be exceptions but not too often. If there are characteristics in a single variety that you wish to produce, in a double flower, it would be advisable to use pollen from a double flower and put it onto the female flower on the single variety. Some strains of tuberous begonias from Europe and the U.S.A. produce pollen quite freely at the end of the flowering season and can be very useful. Just to complicate the hybridizing process, the species from which our modern beautifully flowered hybrids have been bred, have different chromosome numbers; some have fourteen others

have thirteen. Despite this, successful crosses have been made between the varieties with different chromosome numbers. Unless you have a reference of the chromosome numbers of the modern day hybrids you will just have to take your chances as I do. Once you have the desired pollen and it is showing signs of releasing from the anthers it can be transferred to the stigmas of the female flowers by the use of a small water colour paint brush, camel hair is recommended but so long as it is soft and will hold the pollen it will be fine. Be careful not to damage the stigmas as you apply the pollen. If there is a cluster of anthers on the male flower take the flower from the plant and then carefully remove the petals from the flower taking care not to dislodge too much pollen. Then use the cluster of anthers as a brush and dust the pollen directly onto the female flower, taking care not to damage the stigmas. Either of these options can only be performed when the pollen has started to be released freely from the pollen sacks on the sides of the anthers. Leave it too long though and the pollen will be all gone and the opportunity will be lost. Pollen can be stored in black 35mm film canisters in the refrigerator until the desired female flower is ready for pollination. This is when the female flower has been open for a day or two and for the next two or so weeks. I don't know if there are any particular times of the day that are essential for pollination but it is an advantage if it is a nice warm day. The more pollen the female flower receives, the more seed it will produce. The first sign of a successful cross is that the petals on the female flower will fold inwards a little and in three or four days they will fall from the flower. This can even take weeks in colder weather. The seed pod will swell and point downwards. This is an indication that the cross is successful. When the crosses are first made they should be labelled or identified, jewellers' tags are a good option. The cross can be noted on the tag with the female variety on the top and the male below. After six to eight weeks the seed pod should start to ripen (may be even longer in very cold weather). The seed pod will start to turn brown and splits will form at the top of the pod and at this stage it should be taken from the plant and placed in an open container in a warm protected area. When the seed pod is completely dry take two pieces of A4 paper empty the seed on to one sheet and leave the other on the table. Gently lift the sheet holding the seed and tilt it above the one on the table so that the seed will roll onto the lower sheet of paper, by tilting the paper one way then another so that the seed separates from the chaff. Take care not to sneeze or cough while doing this as the seed is so fine it will blow away. The seed can be placed in a small glassine envelope as used by stamp collectors, then place this envelope in a seed envelope (available from a news agent) with the cross noted on it. The seed can be stored

in an airtight container in the refrigerator and will stay viable for years. I germinated seed this year that was pollinated in 1993. Seed from the variety *B. 'Sceptre'* will only keep for one or two years. As most amateur hybridizing is performed towards the end of the flowering season when botrytis could affect the plant or the branch that the seed pod is on it is advisable to spray the plant and seed pod with fungicide suitable for controlling botrytis. I had botrytis affect a side branch which was carrying a prized seed pod, I removed the branch, cut away the botrytis and placed the branch in a glass of water and was able to ripen the seed pod. So be vigilant. As a general rule tuberous begonias are eager to improve themselves and this is evident if you look at the species from which they originated. On the other hand I remember crossing 'Blushing Bride' (female) x 'Wedding day' (male). I was almost drooling at the very thought of the resulting seedlings. It should have been a marriage made in heaven, with the quality of both plants along with the names but it proved to be a disaster. The plants produced very inferior flowers not held but dangled on the weakest of flower stems. But don't let this stop you from trying your luck at this fascinating pastime ■