

VICTORIAN BEGONIA SOCIETY Inc No.A0018681J

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NEXT MEETING

Saturday 17th July 2021

At the Robert Clark Centre, Ballarat Botanical gardens

12:30pm Lunch

Bring your own Lunch . Tea, coffee and Soup will be available

1:30pm Meeting time

Wayne Walters : Demonstrating taking cuttings of rhizomes,etc.

If you have any begonias that could supply cuttings bring them along.

Afternoon Tea Bring some goodies

All Welcome

COVID RESTRICTIONS PERMITTING

Wayne's Words of Wisdom

Hi everyone. How are you all? We hope you are well and if not get well soon.

This is a quiet time for your tuberous begonias which are in storage now. If not in storage cut the foliage off because the tubers want at least eight weeks dormant period time.

I have found this year has been a very strange growing year. Some varieties have grown well and have ripened off well while other varieties of begonias just haven't. You can force them a little by cutting the foliage off and taking them out of their pots. Store them in boxes after cleaning them. Fill the boxes with vermiculite after placing the tubers in the boxes. Don't forget to put labels with the tubers. Sprinkle the tubers with sulphur and check the boxes every couple of weeks for rot. If a tuber starts to rot pull it out and throw it in the rubbish bin. The old soil from the pots can be spread over the garden beds.

We are having soup at our meeting on 17th July. Bring your own sandwiches,etc.

If you have any rhizomatous or other species begonias that need cutting back bring them along so that it could be divided.

If you want to, bring some afternoon tea.

Many thanks Wayne

**HOW FAIR IS A GARDEN AMID THE TRIALS AND PASSIONS
OF EXISTENCE. ~ Benjamin Disraeli**

President Ross presented a number of his plants to demonstrate and discuss the rhizomatous type of begonia - a begonia with a modified stem. There are three forms of rhizomatous begonias: an upright growing plant; a plant with rhizomes growing along the ground; and an underground form, with rhizomes growing just under the surface.

Although on average not thought attractive by some, rhizomatous begonias are the largest group of begonias, both in species and hybrids. There are about 600 or so considered to be rhizomatous from a total of around 1400; there are probably thousands of hybrids, with over 1800 in my own data-base listing alone, and thousands more if Rex hybrids are included - yes, the Rex begonia is a branch of the rhizomatous family. The species plants are originally from Central and South America, Asia and Africa. Chinese taxonomists are frequently discovering new species.

The fact that so many rhizomatous hybrids are produced suggests there must be something special about them - and there is! It is the limitless diversity of leaf patterns, shapes, textures and colouring that makes them so interesting to hybridists. They also have a wide range of growth habits, adding to the charm of the plants. And, of course, they flower as well.

As noted earlier, rhizomatous begonias have a creeping stem which generally runs along the ground but can be upright and a few can grow beneath the surface. One side of the stem gives rise to leaves with very short internodal distances (the distance between leaf petioles) while the other side produces the roots; wherever the stem touches the soil surface it can set roots. Rhizomatous begonias can be propagated easily, provided powdery mildew is not present, from stem (rhizome pieces), or leaf cuttings. Ideally a rhizome should be divided into no more than three pieces. Leaf cuttings can be whole leaf petioles or leaf wedges. Removal of the growing tip from the rhizome will promote side shoots.

Rhizomatous begonias tend to be divided into a number of sub-groups. Some can be considered hardy, while others are considered difficult to grow. The more difficult to grow varieties tend to be tropical species from Asia and Africa. These plants require heat during the cold months and need high levels of humidity. Conversely, some of the Chinese species require cool temperatures in summer to grow successfully; I have had problems keeping these varieties alive during our hot summers. Those plants considered to be hardy are the types collectors have most success in growing and a classic example is *B. 'Cleopatra'*.

The plants in this hardy group come mainly from species of Central and South America, while the species that led to the Rex begonia group are mainly Asian in origin from the Himalayas and south across Asia. Species that have passed on their genetic imprint to the many fine modern hardy hybrids include *B. heracleifolia*, *B. hydrocotylifolia*, *B. manicata*, *B. conchifolia*, *B. carolineifolia*, *B. carrieae* and *B. bowerae*.

These are but a few and their contribution has resulted in a myriad of hybrids now available. The great news is that we in Australia have contributed to this development for many years because we have been fortunate to have a small but dedicated group of hybridisers. This has led to a range of hardy Australian rhizomatous hybrids. These plants are very diverse in leaf shape, pattern, colour and texture, the very features that inspired amateurs to have a go at producing new plants.

Hardy rhizomatous begonias are happy in a wide range of conditions. They will adapt to different light levels from almost full sun (I have seen *B. 'Virbob'* in a garden bed shaded only by a small palm in the middle of the day, otherwise receiving morning and afternoon sun) to full shade. The amount of light reaching them has a big bearing in rhizome begonias. They have better flower colour and have tougher leaves when exposed to more light; light also affects leaf colour. They are tolerant of low temperatures in winter providing they are kept dry and out of frost. The heat of summer does not unduly worry them as long as they are moist and do not dry out. Humidity levels need not be high. Allowing them to become almost dry between waterings (but not letting them wilt) is all that is required. A potting mix with good aeration is important as a heavy mix will compact and remain too wet. Hardy rhizomatous begonias are superb plants for pots, tubs, planters and hanging baskets. They grow excellently in the ground, particularly in raised garden beds.

A plant of the rhizomatous type of particular note is *B. 'Bill Morris'*, created by Ross in 2000, a cross between *B. 'Kim'* and *B. 'Griselda Improved'* - almost black lobed thick textured leaves with a rich red reverse, stunning silver hairs covering the leaves, petioles and young rhizomes which are creeping and well branched. By contrast, plants have been developed with leaves of lovely, autumn colours and the range of colours is improving! ■

Sourced from a NSW Begonia Society newsletter



Rhizomes

Last two photos from ibegonias website

Tuber Care in Winter and Early Spring Mike Stevens

Regular inspection of your tubers throughout the winter months is good insurance against pests and diseases. However if you have not adopted this policy and you have been shamed into looking now, you may well find things like mildew, rot, or tubers resembling Swiss cheese.

Mildew is common on tubers that were not quite dry enough when they were first stored. Left untreated it will eventually cause the tubers to rot. Treatment can be in the form of brushing the offending white area with a soft brush, then giving a good dusting of 'Flowers of Sulphur' or 'Rose Dust'. Place the tubers in the sunshine (if there is any) for a while to give a little more drying to the tuber. I prefer to use this method rather than soaking the tuber in an anti-fungal solution which requires drying the tuber thoroughly again, for generally the weather at this time of year is not conducive to this.

Rot can be a consequence of mildew left unattended or because the tuber was wet when stored — remember wet and cold means rot — but is more likely to be because the scab which formed where the stem was previously attached has not been removed. It is easy to miss removing a scab or two therefore attention should be paid to this area when checking your tubers. Rot comes in two forms, wet and dry. Wet rot should be treated immediately by cutting out the infected portion and dusting with Flowers of Sulphur or 'Rose Dust'. Sometimes the rot has gone too far and the only alternative is to destroy the tuber, which is of course bound to be the one that you treasure most! Often dry rot is difficult to identify, although the tubers tend to feel hard when in this condition. More often than not it is because the tuber will not 'start' that this type of rot comes to notice and the only option is to discard it. If the tuber does not feel right, is hard or appears to be lighter than it should be then you can use the fingernail test. Using your fingernail remove a small piece of the skin to reveal the flesh of the tuber. If brown it is end of story, but if green or red, as some tubers are, then it is probably okay.

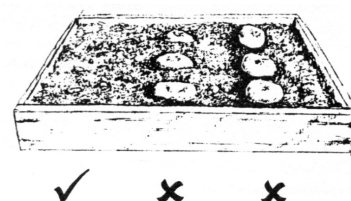
If you find a tuber that looks like Swiss cheese you can be sure you have a visitor and the best thing to do is dispose of it. However if there are only one or two holes then I would suggest a little investigation. Using a stiff piece of wire it is generally possible to hook the wee beasties out of their holes and dispose of them with a number nine boot. Sometimes however the holes are very difficult to locate. In this case to be really sure that you get them all soak those tubers in a Malathion solution the same strength as if for spraying, for around 15 minutes, which will kill off any that remain.

Starting

With your tubers budded up it is time to set them into full growth. The speed of this will depend on whether you have bottom heat or not, lack of such a facility does not affect the growth in anyway, it just means the flowers will be a little later. Plants only have a set period in which they will flower so by starting them earlier you can expect them to finish earlier and vice versa.

Do not start your better tubers in last year's potting mix, which should be discarded by putting on the garden as a soil conditioner. In the small confines of the pot there will be a build up of salts harmful to the fresh young roots as they grow.

Your tubers can be started in pots or in trays as you wish. If in pots be sure to place the larger tubers that are going directly into their final pot and will not be potted on, a little deeper in the pot, about 8 cm below the top. This is to facilitate later top dressing which will encourage the roots to cover the whole tuber thereby giving you a bigger root system and better plant. Those that are started in trays should be potted up into a pot of relevant size when they have a good root system. As a general rule use a pot that is one inch (2.5 cm) bigger all round than the root ball. The amount of top growth is not important at this time, only the root growth.



Do not over water tubers that are in the 'starting' mode. As long as the mix they are placed in is moist that is all they require for at this stage they have little or no root system. Cover the tubers with 2 cm of mix (see diagram) to ensure that any hollow in the tuber does not collect water. If this hollow is filled with mix then capillary action will ensure an even distribution of moisture, and it also serves to encourage root growth as mentioned above.

Seeds

Those of you who have ventured into sowing begonia seed should by now be seeing the results of your endeavours. If you have not sown your seed by now you are fast running out of time to get the plants to the stage where they give you nice large tubers before the first frosts of next year come along. Those who sowed their seed in June or early July may have already done the first pricking out. Be sure to be very gentle and do not damage the tiny stems. Use a fine mister to mist them if they are not in a propagator and add a small amount of both Phostrogen and a fungal spray to this water.

Cuttings

Anyone who took cuttings last season or maybe purchased some will no doubt be itching to see what size tuber you have managed to grow, that's if you haven't investigated already! Unless the mix in the pot is wet/damp try to resist disturbing the tuber at this stage. The end of August is early enough to harvest them, clean them up and start them back into growth. However, if the mix is wet or damp I would knock it out to ensure that the tuber does not rot, if it hasn't done so already. It is very disappointing to find absolutely nothing there which will probably be the case if you have let the cutting flower. This also appears to happen to plants that have been raised from a tissue culture. I would suggest that any plant so raised should be treated as a cutting and not be allowed to flower in its first season. Well, maybe just one to see what it is like! If the tuber is small, the size of a ten cent piece or less then I would suggest placing it somewhere warm straight away to kick it back into life before it has time to shrink, otherwise it could be left for a week or two.