

**VICTORIAN BEGONIA SOCIETY Inc No.A0018681J**

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### **NEXT MEETING**

#### **Was to have been on SATURDAY 18TH SEPTEMBER, 2021**

While there is some hope of restrictions being eased in the country during the next couple of weeks it is very doubtful that this would mean we could meet on this day.

If we are allowed to meet then Wayne will be showing how to take cuttings from rhizomatous begonias etc. plus some attention to tubers at this time. You would need to bring your own lunch and we would provide tea/coffee.

We would also be holding a Committee Meeting at 11:30 am

If in doubt contact the Secretary or President.

#### **Hopefully we will be able to hold our AGM and Luncheon on Saturday, 20th November 2021**

***Our thoughts are with Stan and Alma at this time as Alma spends time in care***

### **Wayne's Words of Wisdom**

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

The Covid 19 has made it hard to plan anything. It is time to pot your begonias. Pot your tuberous begonias into small pots using a good premium potting mixture. Plant the tubers and cover them with soil about ½ inch deep. When potting your tuberous begonias make sure your tubers are nice and firm and every pot has its correct name tag on it. When you are potting up it is a good practise to use clean pots and make sure the benches are cleaned before you start. Make sure your name tags are correctly named and clean.

If there is a meeting on Saturday 18th September bring your own lunch and we will supply tea and coffee. Bring some goodies for afternoon tea.

There will be a Committee meeting at 11:30am.

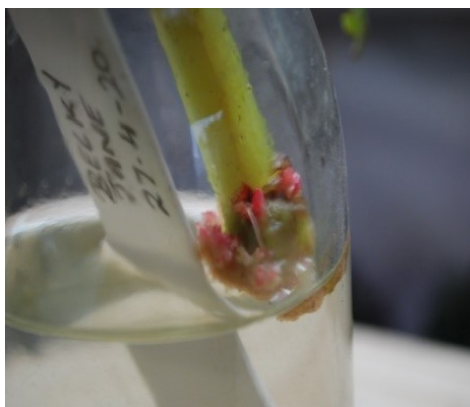
Wayne will be dividing some begonias and taking cuttings so you could bring some begonia plants which need cutting off and dividing as well if you would like.

Thanks to Ralph and Jan Willsmore for the article on pages 2 to 4. This article can now be viewed on our website under Cultivation notes and can also be easily downloaded.

## **UNUSUAL EXPERIMENTS WITH TUBEROUS BEGONIAS**    Ralph Willsmore

Sometime ago I set out to produce tubers of varieties I thought was becoming very scarce. But that became a disaster as I could not obtain materials I normally use for propagation. So I hope the couple of methods may increase your stocks of named varieties of Tuberous Begonias.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020 I had a young vigorous plant of 'Becky Jane' which I decided to take a cutting from; a mallet cutting was taken from a flowering bud section of the plant with no growth buds whatsoever. I put neat purple clonex® on the wound of the cutting, I then thought this might burn the cutting so I wiped off the Clonex off the cutting as much as I could. It was then placed in a bottle containing filtered mains water. And placed it in my little plant propagator which was set at 25°C, it also had a tiny grow lux and fluoro lights for fourteen hours a day. This is most important as otherwise the cuttings will go dormant. To my surprise in about 4 to 5 weeks the cuttings had callused and were forming multiple growth buds. Another month on there were several shoots growing vigorously on the cuttings. The growths were small and I took several as cuttings but only 2 survived as I had my propagator too wet and humid, which made them rot off as they were extremely soft. Two survived but only one made a good tuber. The pot in the accompanied photo shows a 2 inch pot, so they were very tiny tubes.



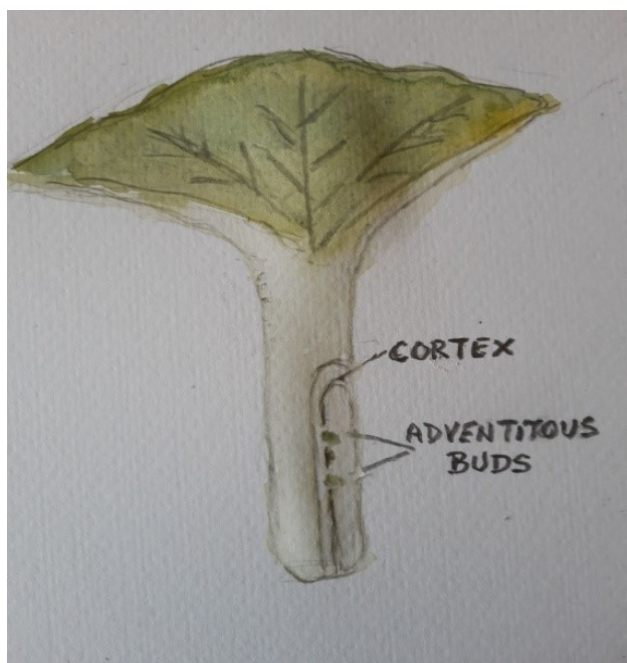
In May 2021 I repeated the procedure with a cutting from the plant of 'Blushing Bride'. I took the cutting from the top of the plant before it was about to die down, the top was still very fresh. It was a mallet cutting which had no growth buds, I put purple Clonex® on the cut surfaces and once again wiped it all off, and put it in water. After some time it took roots and started to form shoots. I planted it in a 4 inch pot very close to the surface, where I will only be able to retrieve 1 or 2 cuttings above ground. Some of the shoots are below soil level and will probably not develop.

### **'BLUSHING BRIDE' CUTTINGS BELOW**



## **KEIKI GROW on Tuberous Begonias** by Ralph Willsmore

A friend of mine, John O'Hara, told me about a product called Keiko Grow® available on the internet for about \$35.00, A VERY TINY TUBE BUT IT GOES A LONG WAY. This product is used to produce adventitious buds on certain orchids. I tried a few cuttings with limited success but then I tried it on a leaf or petiole cutting of the variety 'Uluru', and this cutting produced two adventitious buds on the cortex of this cutting, which eventually formed two tiny tubers as in the photo.



I cut a leaf with stem fairly close to the main stem of the plant, I then cut a narrow piece from the side of the cutting to expose the cortex in the stem as this is where the adventitious shoots are more likely to appear, a small amount of Keiki paste was placed on the cut surface, the process produces a white substance on the cutting before the shoots appear. Two buds appeared while the cuttings were in water. So I then planted the cutting in the 2 inch tube. It took months for a shoot to appear from the surface of the soil, but finally one did. The leaf maintained a healthy appearance throughout. When it was finally harvested I was left with two tiny but healthy tubers, and they are showing signs of growth buds. Neat purple Clonex® would possibly produce adventitious buds if it was put on the cut surfaces and then wiped off with a tissue. Definitely do not wash off.

Happy experimenting



## MORE CUTTINGS FROM TUBEROUS BEGONIAS

BY Ralph Willsmore

If you have a named variety of tuberous begonia which produces little or no side shoots for cuttings you can try the following. The plant used in this exercise was the variety of 'Alyce' which is shy of producing side shoots, it was growing in a 6 inch pot in late Spring early summer when the top of the plant was removed, and it was cut between the last bud growth node and the first flower bud node. The severed section was cut into sections producing three mallet cuttings. The plant was then repotted into an eight inch pot and it produced multiple shoots, some of which were used as cuttings.



↑ THE CUT SECTION HAS 3 MALLET CUTTINGS 15cm or 6 inch pot ↑

EXTRA GROWTHS ON REPOTTED 8INCH OR 20CM POT ↑

### MALLET CUTTINGS OF TUBEROUS BEGONIAS BY Ralph Willsmore

In the late 1980 to early 1990 we grew Elatior (Heimalis Begonias) commercially, and one way of propagating them was by mallet cuttings. That led me to try Mallet cuttings with tuberous begonias. The first attempt using neat Clonex® on the mallet cuttings was fairly successful in late spring to early summer, but as the summer heated up the clonex tended to burn the cuttings, so I diluted the Clonex® with water. That was not so successful with the mallet cutting.

The first attempt produced many adventitious buds, sometimes a complete ring of them around the top of the cuttings. The resulting tubers from these cuttings left a lot to be desired, They resembled a cluster of haemorrhoids, so I modified the mallet cuttings by cutting away a section of the main plant stem, which produced tubers of a normal shape. I have now gone back to using complete Clonex® and wiping it all off. When wiping it off I feel some of the Clonex® might go into the surface of the cutting. This is working very well in the cooler months, but I have not tried this in the hotter months as yet.



↑ Cutting from main stem

↑ Cutting section of main stem

↑ Completed cutting

## **PRUNING BEGONIAS** Peter Sharp

I find that many growers are somewhat hesitant to use the secateurs, possibly not realizing the benefits of doing so when necessary. I well remember a talk by one of our foremost growers and hybridists, Lyla Kilpatrick from Western Australia, who posed the question 'are you frightened of pruning?' and her advice was: 'Shut your eyes and cut – you'll soon get used to it', or words to that effect. She was so right in stressing the benefits of pruning and I have heeded her advice ever since, hardened my heart and cut into my precious begonias, seldom to be disappointed. So, if you want your begonias to look their best then most of them need to be pruned.

**In the early stages of growth**, the shrub-like and the semperflorens (and only these) need regular tip pruning to encourage the bushy growth so desirable.

**Advanced plants** of the cane-like, shrub-like, semperflorens and trailing/scandent groups need to be kept to a desirable shape and size and such trimming as is necessary can be done at almost any time throughout the growing season, however annual pruning is also needed as discussed below.

**The cane-likes** need an annual prune so that they will remain the height that you want whilst not growing into leggy and somewhat unsightly plants. Do this in late winter – they will tell you when by starting to put on new growth from the buds which have formed at the nodes. Firstly, in advanced plants remove totally the old, brown canes from the centre of the plant: new canes will grow from the root system on the outside of the plant. Next, decide what size you want your plant to be then cut accordingly – reducing by a third or more will do no harm. Cut just above an outward facing node so that the new growth will be on the outside of the plant. Try not to make all your cuts at the same height – some should be low so that the plant will leaf up for the whole of its height. Your cane-likes will develop one (seldom more) new canes from the topmost node or nodes. Use the cuttings to propagate new plants. *B. luxurians*, classified strangely as a shrub-like, responds in the same way to pruning as the cane-likes.

**The shrubs** look their best when early pruning produces that very desirable bushy shape, dense foliage from top to bottom providing a beautiful background for the eventual flowering. Most of the shrub-likes will accept quite heavy pruning but I have found that *B. sanguinea* will take years to recover from this, and just light trimming, if at all, is the way to go here. It is best, I find, to prune throughout their growing season, except of course when buds have set and flowers appear.

**The rhizomes** need pruning too. Remove the growing tips of the ground-hugging ones to keep the plant within bounds. This will encourage the growth of lateral rhizomes, thus producing much fuller plants. Do this after flowering, then at the end of winter remove all the old leaves to allow room for the new foliage and the flowers to follow. Again, use the rhizome tips to propagate new plants.

The erect growing rhizomes need to be cut back hard each year, usually towards the end of winter, and the tips thus removed used for propagation. In the Botanic Gardens in Sydney we re-propagate these upright rhizomes and replace them each year, often striking the tips direct in the garden.

**The thick stemmed** begonias are an odd lot and I'm rather fond of them. They mostly grow tall with bare stems and the trick here is to prune quite hard, using the tips to propagate new ones and we find that a number planted close together produce a good display. Usually just one new stem will develop from the topmost node. Nature's way of reproduction, apart from seed, is that the tall bare stems eventually collapse, and where they touch the soil they very quickly root and produce a new plant, whilst new growth appears from the original root. Natural layering.

**The trailing/scandent** begonias also benefit from thoughtful pruning. If the long trailers grow to look unsightly then prune them back to a better length, usually after flowering or a little later. Main purpose here is to keep the plant looking good. Removing completely old trailers will encourage new growth.

Always use a good pair of by-pass secateurs for pruning, making sure that they are sharp and are sterilised before use, and repeat this between plants if you are at all uncertain as to the health of the plants you are working with. Pruning is one sure way to spread disease if present.

My pruning mantra is: **"If uncertain, cut."** ■

Sourced from *Begonia Australis* September 2011

## **Watering Begonias** L Kilpatrick

How often shall I water my Begonias? A question so often asked and there is no simple answer. Like all other plants Begonias are watered when they need it. Fortunately a plant's need for water can be assessed by sight or touch unlike problems with pH, or toxic soil. A caring, observant grower will soon learn to recognise the signs.

There are many conditions which will affect the amount of water a plant requires and how frequently it is required - temperature, humidity, size of plant in proportion to pot size, wind, type of pot (plastic, ceramic, clay), quality of soil. With low temperatures &/or high humidity the plant will not need to transpire as much moisture to cool and moisten its foliage. In hot or very dry windy conditions the plants will give off and so use much more moisture. A vigorous plant with a healthy root system will soon fill the soil with roots. Less soil to hold moisture and more moisture needed to service the growing plant.

The solution is to place the plant in a larger pot or water more frequently. When a plant is potted on and so has extra soil or a seedling or freshly rooted cutting is potted up less frequent watering is needed because there is surplus soil to hold the moisture. As the plant grows and the roots fill the pot watering will have to be increased. The type of container used will make a big difference. Plastic or ceramic pots lose water from the surface soil only, through evaporation and of course that which the roots take up, whereas clay pots lose water through the porous clay. Wonderful for keeping the soil and roots cool but demanding in our hot, dry summers. The same applies to hanging containers where fibre liners are used. I use fibre liners because I think they look good and allow good air flow to soil and roots but once the roots have filled the soil they will need extra water. Certainly in our climate they will need watering every day and probably twice on our hottest days.

The quality of soil has a bearing on the amount of water it will retain. Potting mixes which contain animal manure, compost, peat moss, Vermiculite or such will naturally hold moisture longer than those with little humus. Some growers use water crystals or other moisture holding properties to help retain moisture in the soil and this has to be taken into account. A grower could keep a check list and each morning tot up the points for heat, wind, size of plant, etc, but a loving, observant grower soon gets to know their plants and recognise their needs.

Begonias do require air spaces in the soil to breathe and if these aren't available over a lengthy period, the plant will die. At the same time there must be moisture available which the roots will reach for. So the ideal is to water your plants thoroughly and leave to drain. If the soil is free draining and has a proportion of humus (animal manure, peat moss) air spaces will be left between the solid particles as the surplus water drains away while the humus will retain moisture which the roots can use as needed ■

*Sourced from Begonia Society of W.A. Newsletter April/May, 2011*

### **Begonia froebelii**



I recently received this email from Marilyn Watson regarding a tuberous species she is growing. Anyone who would like some seeds please contact Maz as soon as possible at:  
Marilyn.watson@gmail.com

Hi Peter,  
I have managed to set seed on this lovely tuberous species if you any one who would like to grow it? The pod is still green. It is a winter grower on a heat mat but quite stunning  
Hope this finds you well. I hear there are interesting movements at the nursery in Ballarat! They have discovered begonias are important!!  
CU Maz

