

Begonias are a group of plants originating in the tropics and subtropics that are prized for their ability to add color to our summer gardens and winter windowsills. Some varieties are valued most for their ornamental foliage; others bloom brilliantly in shady nooks. For caring for begonias as houseplants, see the information sheet in our houseplant section.

As outdoor plants, begonias thrive in pots and hanging baskets, or they can be used as bedding plants in your borders. They prefer a rich, well-drained, neutral to slightly acidic soil. Most begonias dislike direct sun and will provide the richest color in your shadier—but not completely dark--corners. Tuberous begonias can often be stored, with care, over the winter; other varieties should usually be treated as annuals. Begonias are tender plants; do not plant them outdoors until all danger of frost is past.

PLANTING INSTRUCTIONS

If planting your begonia in a planter or basket, use either a good peat-based potting mixture or a mix of equal parts of straight compost and potting mix. Mix in a cup of bone meal. If planting your begonias in the ground, first mix equal parts of compost with your soil. Fertilize with a high quality organic rose and flower fertilizer. Dig a hole a little deeper than your begonia rootball and twice as wide. Next, water both the plant and the entire hole. Allow time for this to soak in completely and drain; you do not want to plant your begonias in a mud puddle. When the hole has drained, you're ready to plant your begonia. When placing the plant in the hole, lightly scratch the outside of the rootball to help encourage root growth into the new soil. Add more water just at the base of the plant to settle in the new roots. Don't push the plant down in or firm the soil around it, just let the plant settle in naturally.

WATER

Begonias prefer moist but not soggy conditions. Allow the top inch of soil to dry out before watering, then water thoroughly. They prefer cool situations, so on very hot days misting them with water may be useful. This is particularly useful for plants in pots. As growth slows in the fall, reduce watering and feeding.

FERTILIZER

While your begonia is growing actively and blooming, make sure it's well-fed. For plants in pots and/or if you didn't use a slow-release, organic fertilizer at the time you planted, we recommend applying any high quality balanced liquid fertilizer (N-P-K about the same—e.g. 5-7-5, 20-20-20) once every two weeks. Dilute the fertilizer as recommended by the manufacturer or it may burn your plants.

Specific begonia types have slight differences in the care and conditions they prefer—see the descriptions on the next page for the variety you have.



REX, IRON CROSS, & BEEFSTEAK BEGONIAS These rhizomatous begonias are grown primarily for their foliage. Rex begonias grow to a foot tall. Leaves are an off-center heart shape, dark green with markings ranging from silvery to red. Rex begonias can change color according to light levels; more light can deepen red tones in the leaves, less light can enhance the metallic luster. Beefsteak begonias are six-eight inches tall with fleshy, shiny leaves that are olive to dark green on top, red underneath. Iron Cross begonias are tall (to twenty inches) with heart-shaped puckered leaves, green marked with a mahogany cross. Foliage begonias like bright shade and dislike overwatering. They can be overwintered indoors, but if they get rangy it's best to discard them.



RIEGER BEGONIAS Rieger Begonias (sometimes listed as *hiemalis* or *Elatior* hybrids) are usually fibrous-rooted. They are bushy plants with masses of single or double flowers in pinks, oranges, white, yellow, or red. The leaves are typically an off-center heart shape. They prefer a filtered shade and are best considered as annuals.



WAX BEGONIAS Wax Begonias (also called *semperflorens* or “bedding begonias”) are also usually fibrous-rooted. They are bushy plants valued both for their “waxy” light green to bronzy foliage and their profusion of white, pink, or red flowers. This variety will tolerate more sun than the others; it is happy in anything from light shade to full sun. The bronze-leaved varieties take the most sunlight.



TUBEROUS & NONSTOP BEGONIAS These varieties are grown from tubers for their clusters of handsome flowers. With careful management, you can lift the tubers in the fall, dry them, and store them in a cool (41° to 50° F) location until spring. Fill a flat or box at least 2 ½ inches deep with potting soil. Place the tubers hollow side up with the top just below the surface. Do not let the soil dry out completely, but don't overwater either. After the bud appears in spring, plant in potting soil and move to bright indirect light. Transplant the begonias to their final location after good root development is apparent, while top growth is still less than 4 to 5 inches tall.



ANGEL WING BEGONIAS Angel Wing Begonias (also called *coccinea*) are fibrous-rooted. They have bamboo-like stems taller than most begonias (up to four feet if unpruned) and are valued both for their green and red foliage and for their coral-red flowers which appear in drooping clusters. Maculata Begonias have silver-marked leaves and pale pink drooping flowers on a similar plant.