

THE

BEGONIAN

September/October 2011



The Begonian

Publication of the American Begonia Society

American Begonia Society

Founded January 1932 by Herbert P. Dyckman

Aims and Purposes

To stimulate and promote
interest in begonias
and other shade-loving plants.

To encourage the introduction and development
of new types of these plants.

To standardize the nomenclature of begonias.

To gather and publish information in regard to
kinds, propagation, and culture of begonias and
companion plants.

To issue a bulletin that will be mailed to
all members of the society.

To bring into friendly contact all
who love and grow begonias.

B. potamophila

Photo by Jacky Duruisseau

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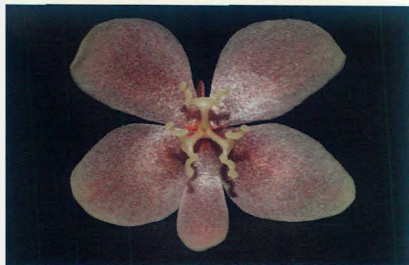
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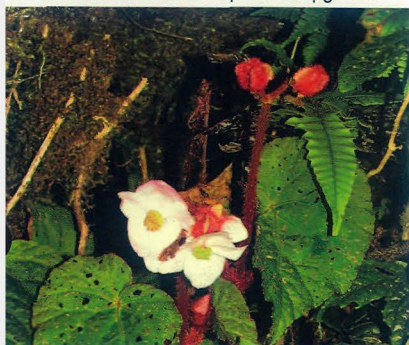
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Back cover: The strangely shaped flowers of the orchid, *Bulbophyllum blumei*, are brood site mimics. Find out more about this interesting orchid and others in Thomas Mirenda's highly entertaining article on page 144.

President's Message

Hello. We are all familiar with the concept of the duck, which appears calm and collected as it glides along effortlessly on the surface the water. However, it is paddling like crazy below the surface.

Organizations are like that.

If a group of any size is successful it is because of the members who are willing to do the "paddling like crazy" behind the scenes. Often these members are so good at keeping things going that they are not always given the thanks and recognition that they deserve.

I would like to challenge all of you to pay attention to everything that goes on to produce a meeting, a show, a sale or a convention. Notice what is being done and by whom. Give thanks for these people. Give thanks to them.

I am grateful for so many members who work so hard in so many ways to make the American Begonia Society what it is.

God bless you,

Cheryl

B. 'Caravan' a shrub-like begonia resulting from a cross between *B. sementacea* x *B. listada*.

Grown by Gene Salisbury. Photo by Jem Wiseman

Letters to the Editor

Can You Help? Looking for *B. U062* and *B. U093*

Dear Editor.

I am a member of the ABS. I wish to have help. I lost *B. U062* and *B. U093*. I have looked at a lot of famous vendors but nobody has these left. Would anyone please be able to help me locate a vendor or other source so I may buy cuttings of these plants? I would also be happy for some good tips to grow them.

Email me at tokfian2000@yahoo.se

Thanks in advance for your help.

Best regards from a hopeful member!

Ann-Sofie J. Asplind

Sweden

A Very Generous Offer

Dear Editor,

For the members that are trying to collect a set of *The Begonian* I have a lot of 40's and 50's issues I would like to give away. All I ask is postage. Send me the issues you need and I will let you know how many on your list I have. My address is 10550 Western Ave. #133, Stanton CA 90680. E-mail me at bboopfans@aol.com.

I have almost a complete set I have collected thru the years. I am missing a few from different years. If you have extras, like me, I would be willing to trade. I have a couple of mimeographed 1938's, and I think one 1940.

I really like going back through them and reading about the ABS way back then. They have been invaluable in research-



ing the older begonias, and a lot of other things.

The b/w issues are not too popular, though. Since I have so many of them, and a lot of duplicates, I am pulling out articles that pertain to begonias I have and putting them in a notebook for easy reference.

I use the color issues to give out at our shows and sales. I put our branch name and meeting date on a label and put it on the front. They always seem to get picked up. Hope to hear from other Begonian collectors.

-Bobbie West

Above: Antique botanical print of *B. chlorosticta*
Courtesy of Julie Vanderwilt

Conservation Chairman

This issue contains another wonderful and informative article by Bill Claybaugh, our Conservation Chairman.

Bill has asked to be relieved of the duties of his office in order to free himself to pursue his studies at a more leisurely pace. He will continue to entertain and educate us without the demands of deadlines.

We have all benefited from his many excellent articles and observations over the years. We look forward to more of

the same. Thank you, Bill

Our new Conservation Chair is Johanna Zinn.

She is already a well-recognized writer and contributor to *The Begonian* and we will all welcome her continuing efforts in the future.

Best of luck to both of you,
Cheryl Lenert, ABS President

Opposite page: B. 'Angel Glow'
Photo by Bill Claybaugh

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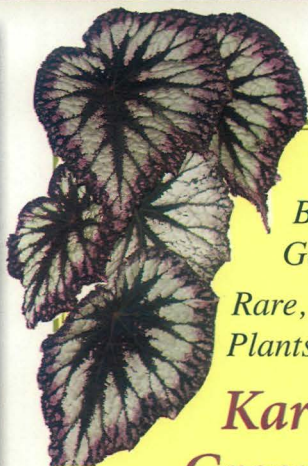


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B. subvillosa var. *leptotricha*

Article and photos by Bill Claybaugh, Conservation Chairman

For a plant lover in the Houston area, the past two years have been very frustrating because of the hard, early freezes we have had. Personally, my begonia collection has suffered hundreds of casualties and many old friends have disappeared. The only bright spot is that it has led me to re-discover the beauty and mystery of a long-neglected component of my begonia collection, i.e., the *Semperflorens* species begonias. Now that spring and summer have arrived, I find my species *Semperflorens* have survived the ordeal better than anticipated, either as plants or as seeds/seedlings hidden away from the cold. Specifically, as I look around the shade house, I find *Begonia subvillosa* var. *subvil-*

Conservation Comment

losa, subvillosa var. *leptotricha*, and *fischeri*. Outside I find some of the same plus *Begonia cucullata*. Of these, *B. subvillosa* var. *leptotricha* has endured the hardships best (read that as, it is now a broadly distributed weed).

This plant was originally described as *B. leptotricha* in 1914 by C. de Candolle. It was not until 1983 that L. B. Smith and D. C. Wasshausen concluded that this plant should be considered a variation of *B. subvillosa* Klotzsch. Prior to this 1983 publication there was much discussion on the subject among ABS members for

sundry reasons but mainly because these *Semperflorens* are so variable in nature.

B. subvillosa var. *leptotricha* is in Section *Begonia* which has what Mark Tebbitt in his recent book describes with the following "... combination of characters: plants perennial, lacking tubers, petiole joining leaf blade at an angle and lacking a ring of hairs below point of attachment with blade, leaf venation palmate or palmate-pinnate (never pinnate), male flowers with four tepals, anthers oblong, longer than the filaments, connectives project, bracteoles two to three, female flowers with five tepals, placenta bifid." This species meets all of these criteria, so is in Section *Begonia*, but has other unusual characteristics that make it difficult to examine, describe, and definitely identify.

The first unusual character is that the leaf margins upon the same plant will

vary from serrated with small protrusions at the veins, to subentire with little to no protrusions. Confusing! Second sexuality of the inflorescence is constantly in doubt because the flowers come on the inflorescence in an unusual sequence. What happens is that the male flowers come on first, mature and drop off, and then the inflorescence puts on a complete array of female flowers. Almost every inflorescence I examined had either completely male flowers, or completely female flowers, rarely both. Never the less, this inflorescence must be considered bisexual and protandrous (male flowers mature first). A third confusing character is the inflorescence general arrangement, i.e., it is certainly not racemose but rather is cymose, however, it is not uniformly "basally dichotomous" as the term was used by L. B. Smith. This confusion in descriptive nomenclature



B. subvillosa var. *leptotricha* **Opposite page:** Female flowers **Above:** Male flowers bloom first

makes the use of the “Begoniaceae Key” of Smith very difficult because he interpreted the inflorescence of *B. subvillosa* as having a “central axis” putting it into his Subkeys 27 or 28. I’m not saying this is wrong, but it’s certainly not an obvious choice - much more confusion. Fourth, the plant has a red dot at the petiole/blade attachment point, in the mature leaves, but not in the immature leaves. These are totally green. Fifth, some leaves have small, almost unnoticeable brown hairs on the upper surface while other leaves may be totally glabrous. More and more confusion!! Sixth, the ... and so forth.

The list goes on, but so does this vibrant, dynamic little plant. One to enjoy, but don’t take it too seriously or it will humble you with its total disregard for consistency.

On a personal note, this will be my 50th and last article for *The Begonian* as Conservation Chairman. I no longer have the time necessary for this important position within ABS, therefore I am “retiring”. I will however, continue to write as time allows.



B. subvillosa var. *leptotricha*



A Word with You: Living Arrangements

By Claudia Goodridge, New Haven, CT

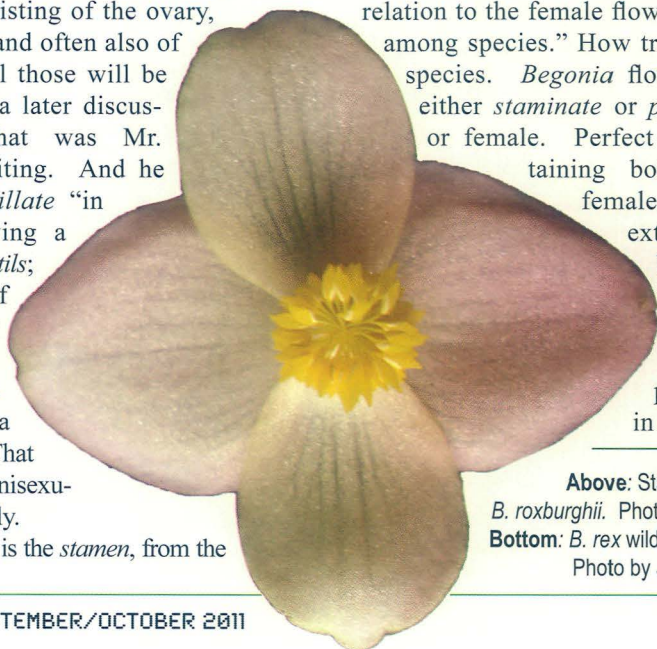
That stunning photo of a dried seed capsule on the July/August cover, and the equally captivating centerfold, pushed me into flower vocabulary. I must confess that I've been avoiding the subject as it's so complex, but I'll start. That brown capsule was labeled as a "dried pistillate flower."

Pistil, "the seed bearing organ of a flower, consisting of the ovary, the stigma, and often also of a style," (all those will be subjects of a later discussion). That was Mr. Webster writing. And he defines *pistillate* "in botany, having a pistil or pistils; said usually of a flower which has a pistil but is without a stamen." That means it's unisexual, female only.

Then there is the *stamen*, from the

Latin *stare*, to stand, "the male reproductive organ in flowers ... and is composed in most cases of two parts, the filament and the anther which is filled with pollen." This one is also unisexual, male only. *Staminate* then has a *stamen*, but no *pistil*.

Mark Tebbitt says "The individual flowers of *Begonia* are always unisexual, and the position of the male flowers in relation to the female flowers is variable among species." How true in our own species. *Begonia* flowers then are either *staminate* or *pistillate*, male or female. Perfect flowers, containing both male and female organs, are extremely rare in begonias, but they do exist; *The Begonian* has a picture of one in the May/June



Above: Staminate flowers on *B. roxburghii*. Photo by Jacky Duruisseau
Bottom: *B. rex* wild collected male flower. Photo by Johanna Zinn



issue, on p. 89. Mother Nature does like to keep us on our toes.

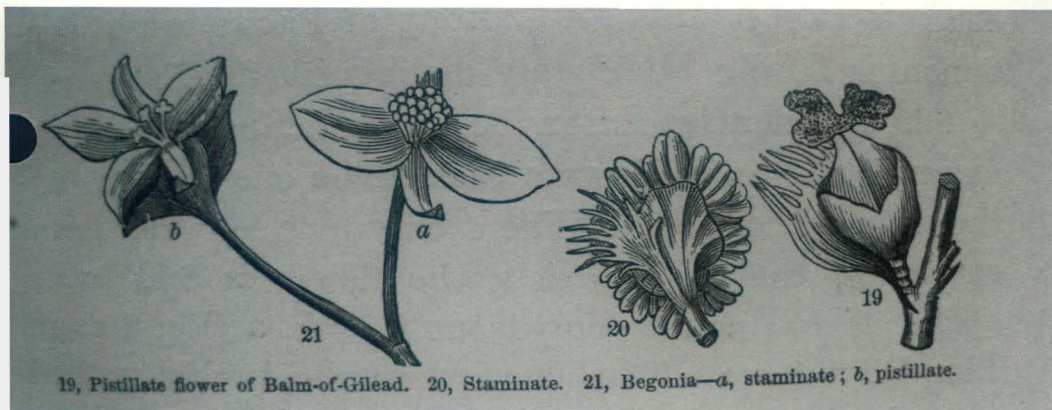
Remembering the difference is the problem. High school botany taught me flower structure, and that teaching meant tests; tests often meant learning devices or crutches, especially with exotic vocabulary, and somehow pistils became pistols which registered with me as quintessentially male toys, except for Annie Oakley; so she became the pistol queen and pistils the female flower part – make sense? Stamens by default then were male.

Visually recognizing the differences in the flowers is more challenging, at least for me as I never really looked at begonia flowers in much detail before taking this on. Orchid flowers, yes, but they're a "perfect" flower with male and female in the same package. Look at the accompanying begonia flower photos and the line drawing from Alphonso Wood's *Lessons in Botany*, 1889. I see fewer petals/tepals on the *staminate* flower, more petals/tepals on the *pistillate* flower. I also see a budding seed capsule under the *pistillate* flower – especially visible in one photo of *B. 'Splotches'*. I'll need to dig deeper into the literature to see if that distinction holds, and will amplify if it doesn't. I'm sure there are other distinctions,

but those two will do for me for now.

When she created separate, unisexual flower types, Mother Nature usually put both sexes on the same plant – that's *monoecious*, from two Greek words – *monos* meaning one, single, alone, and *oikos* meaning house; *monoecious* includes most *Begonia*. Occasionally the flowers are on separate plants, making them *dioecious*; *di* meaning two in Greek. *Dioecious* begonias are not so common, but *B. roxburghii* is one example. Mark Tebbitt has beautiful pictures of its female and male flowers in his book. This distinction makes it easier for me to understand why I need at least 2 of certain garden plants to get seed. Holly is one of those *dioecious* types. I just hope the two I get are not both male or both female.

So we have separate living arrangements; one house with male and female residents, or two houses with the sexes living separately. I wonder who has the china.



Opposite page: *B. 'Splotches'*. Top and underside views of pistillate flower. Photos by Johanna Zinn

Above, top: Pistillate and staminate flowers from Alphonso Wood's *Lessons in Botany*, 1889. Courtesy of Claudia Goodridge **Bottom:** *B. media* pistillate flowers Photo by Jacky Duruisseau



B. thomsonii *A. de Candolle*

Another 'New' Species Recorded for Arunachal Pradesh

Article & photos by
Rekha Morris, Pendleton, SC

My initial attempts to document *Begonia* species in Arunachal Pradesh in 2005 is illustrative of the adage "Fools rush in.....!" By 2005 I had learned a little about the *begonias* of Mexico, but my familiarity with the *begonias* of India amounted to nothing but passionate intensity. Despite this informational lacuna I managed to document some of the most desirable and sought after species such as *B. aborensis*, *B. griffithiana*, *B. silletensis*, *B. xanthina*, the legendary *B. rex* Putzeys not seen in the wild for over a century, and a species with scarlet roots and stems, the latter covered in long red hair. It was months before I identified this species as *B. thomsonii* [Platycentrum].

My finding *B. thomsonii* was serendipitous. At about 5600' I came across a colony of tall growing *impatiens* whose gold and ruby flowers resembled no other *impatiens* I had seen so far in Arunachal Pradesh. The plants, some 3'- 4' tall, were massed together so densely that I did not realize that they grew in a boggy ditch at the base of the cliff I was scrutinizing for *begonias*. I could not resist getting a closer look at the curiously shaped flowers sparsely sprinkled in this colony, which stretched in an irregular arc some 25' long, and incautiously stepped into the squelching mud of the ditch. With my feet sinking in this bog I lost my balance, and in trying to keep from falling



Opposite page, top: *B. thomsonii* in Meghalaya, 2008. Bottom: Red margined pubescent foliage of *B. thomsonii*, Meghalaya, 2008.

This page, top: *B. thomsonii*, Arunachal. Middle: *B. thomsonii*, 2009 Feb., Arunachal. Bottom: *Impatiens cathartii*



Top: *B. thomsonii* in Arunachal Pradesh, 2005

Bottom: Embankment with *B. thomsonii*, Meghalaya, 2008

outright I grasped at the plants within reach, which turned out to be several thick stems of these *impatiens* which collapsed under my weight, taking me down with them into the mush.

As I struggled to find my footing, I noticed a clump of 3-4 plants of a *begonia* until then hidden behind the much taller growing *impatiens*. All the broadly ovate acuminate leaves some 6"-7" long with a broadly cordate base were riddled with holes from insect predation, and the entire plant was far from being striking. Since I had not encountered this species in the two days I had spent examining these ridges, I reached down to pry a plant out of the muddy embankment where they were lodged among some rocks, and was taken aback by the intense, deep red of the stems covered in coarse shaggy red hair. With a little effort I pulled up a plant whose rhizome was a dark, maroon red.

Although I found more of these *begonias* scattered about along a stretch of some 200 feet of this unusually soggy hillside, I did not find any flowers or capsules. Memorizing the terrain by the colony of *impatiens*, which I later identified as *I. cathcartii*, and a thicket of *Hydrangea heteromala* with buttery yellow-flowered scandent *Dicentera* twining among its branches, I continued my search further into this range of hills in W. Kameng.

I returned to look for flowers and capsules of this species on an annual basis, but only succeeded in finding a single male

flower until 2009 when I finally found a plant with both male and female flowers and a couple of immature capsules. By this time I had decided that this species, with such startlingly brilliant red stems wrapped in long red hair, was most probably *B. thomsonii* as there was no record of another begonia from India with these characteristics.

Since a number of begonia species in the 19th century had been documented in the Khasia Hills [then in Assam but now in Meghalaya], I made a brief 2 week foray into Meghalaya in 2008. In the Botanical Survey of India's herbarium in Shillong, I came across a sheet with dry leaves identified as those of *B. thomsonii* which had been documented in the extreme south of Meghalaya close to its border with Bangladesh. C. B. Clarke in his coverage of the begonias of India in *The Flora of British India* had referred to a single find spot for *B. thomsonii*, the Khasia mountains where it was recorded at an elevation of 3000'- 4000'.

Although I searched for *B. thomsonii* along the few sections of the Khasia mountains not totally denuded of forests, I did not find them anywhere close to the elevation mentioned by Clarke. However, as indicated in the entry in the Shillong herbarium, I found *B. thomsonii* in the south of Meghalaya close to its border with Bangladesh at an elevation of approximately 400'.

Here along a short length of embankment about 25'-30' long and 10'- 15' high I documented juvenile plants of *B. thomsonii* intermixed with juvenile plants of *B. roxburghii*. Since all the plants of both these species had probably emerged within a few weeks of my arrival there, the foliage of *B. thomsonii* was undamaged except for a few which were in the process of succumbing to mildew infestation.

Pleased as I was to have located a second find spot for *B. thomsonii*, I was

disappointed at finding only juvenile plants which were months away from producing flowers and capsules.

A comparison of the plants from these two sites revealed a few traits which were distinct to each group. The foliage of the plants from Meghalaya, possibly because they were at such an incipient stage of their growth, were pubescent, with their denticulate - ciliate margins often but not invariably defined in red. A few of the slightly older leaves had lost this pubescence, and begun to resemble the mature foliage of the plants from Arunachal. The red stems of plants from both sites were covered in white hair although the petioles of the mature, flower bearing plants from Arunachal were sheathed in dark red hair, as also the ovaries and the outer surfaces of the flowers.

Begonia enthusiasts collect and grow species for their unusual and infinitely varied foliage. *B. thomsonii*'s appeal lies not in its foliage but in the saturated red of its rhizomes, stems, petioles, and long, shaggy hair present on most parts of the plant. However, despite several attempts to grow it in terrariums simulating as best as possible the moisture rich environment of its habitat, I have not yet succeeded in keeping it alive except for 6-8 months. The rarity of this species in the wild makes it imperative that we persist in trying to recreate the conditions under which *B. thomsonii* will thrive in cultivation.

Difficult and demanding as this species is, it is with great pleasure that I introduce *B. thomsonii* as a 'new' species for Arunachal Pradesh.

May 24, 2011

CONTROVERSY REGARDING *B. THOMSONII*:

In his 1879 coverage of the begonias of India in *The Flora of British India*, C. B. Clarke writes " But for the great au-

thority of Alph. DC. [A. de Candolle], the three *B. barbata*, *B. thomsonii* and *B. griffithii* might be united" [p.647].

In Prodrromus A. de Candolle describes each of these as three distinct species, however, in his description of *B. thomsonii* he expresses doubts with regard to treating it as a distinct species, and wonders if the specimen examined from the Hooker herbarium may not be an anomalous form of *B. griffithii* [p.349].

The confusion between *B. thomsonii* and other species arose from the fact that different taxa were distributed under the same number, Griffith 2570 in the Kew herbarium, and in Berlin and Vienna [Notes made available to me by Jack Golding].

Since then *B. griffithii* and *B. barbata* have been united as Clarke had suggested,

and *B. thomsonii* is kept as a separate species. *B. annulata* K. Koch being the oldest of the three names applied to the same species [the other two being *griffithii* and *barbata*], it is accepted as the valid name for both *B. griffithii* and *B. barbata* which are regarded as synonyms of *B. annulata*.

Although *B. barbata* is now regarded as a synonym of *B. annulata*, a further confusion has been created by having the description of *B. barbata* based on Wallich cat. 3679 A and part B [Clarke p. 646] as also the description of *B. rubro-venia* J.D. Hooker, Wall. Cat. B, partly [Clarke, p 645]. Despite the erroneous conclusion which may be derived from this muddle *B. barbata* is not to be regarded as synonymous with *B. rubro-venia*.

To cut through this Gordian Knot and summarize the generally accepted nomenclature for these species: *B. barbata* is 'nomen nudum' and *B. rubro-venia* is now regarded as a synonym of *B. hatacoa* Hamilton ex D. Don [See Lyman B. Smith, Dieter C.

Wasshausen, Jack Golding, and Carrie E. Karegannes, Begonaceae. Washington, DC, 1986].

B. griffithii is generally accepted as a syn. of *B. annulata*, and *B. thomsonii* is acknowledged to be a distinct species not to be confused with either *B. griffithii* / *B. barbata*, now synonyms of *B. annulata* or *B. rubro-venia*, now a synonym of *B. hatacoa*.



Top: Red rhizome of *B. thomsonii*, Arunachal Pradesh, 2005

Bottom: *B. thomsonii*, Meghalaya

The Challenge of Rex Begonias

Article & photos by Michael J. Kartuz, Vista, CA

The king of begonias, Rex Cultorum, is a frustrating challenge to many begonia lovers and growers. Understanding their special cultural requirements will make growing these beautiful begonias easier.

CULTURE

To bring out their lustrous colors, rex begonias require bright filtered light but not direct sun. Temperature is important, not below 50°F. or above 90°F. Provide as much humidity as possible. Grouping plants together in a sheltered area, such as a shade house or greenhouse is recommended. Rex begonias respond to growing under fluorescent light very well. Lamps should be 12 to 14 inches above the plants, and 12 hours of light provided.

GROWING MEDIA

Your regular begonia growing mix should work fine for rex begonias. We use a peat moss based potting medium with perlite added for extra drainage. Do not overpot, as this might increase the danger of rot.

PESTS AND DISEASES

Like other begonias, rexes are relatively free of pests. Mealybug is probably the most common insect problem. A systemic pesticide containing imidacloprid is a recommended control.

The greatest problem many growers tell me is mildew. The best control is an old one, a light dusting of micronized sulfur applied monthly especially during periods



B. 'Satin Jazz'

of cool, damp weather.

PROPAGATION

Rex begonias are easy to propagate and reproduce from leaf cuttings or seed. Leaf cuttings can be rooted in moist perlite in an enclosed container covered with plastic film under fluorescent light. Every rex begonia grown from seed will be different as virtually all rex begonias are complex hybrids. The method is the same as for other begonias grown from seed. (See photos on page 142.)

WINTER DORMANCY

One of the greatest misunderstandings of rex begonias is their need for winter dormancy when grown under natural light. It is usually not a problem with plants grown under artificial light. When leaves start to go, keep plants almost dry. The rhizomatous stems will stay. In early spring cut back the stems about half way. New growth usually starts in late March or early April.



Dazzling Rex begonias from the Michael Kartuz Greenhouse. **Top left:** B. 'Beau Rouge' **Top, right:** B. 'Valentine Lace'
Bottom, right: Benchful of Rex begonias **Bottom, left:** Unnamed Rex begonias





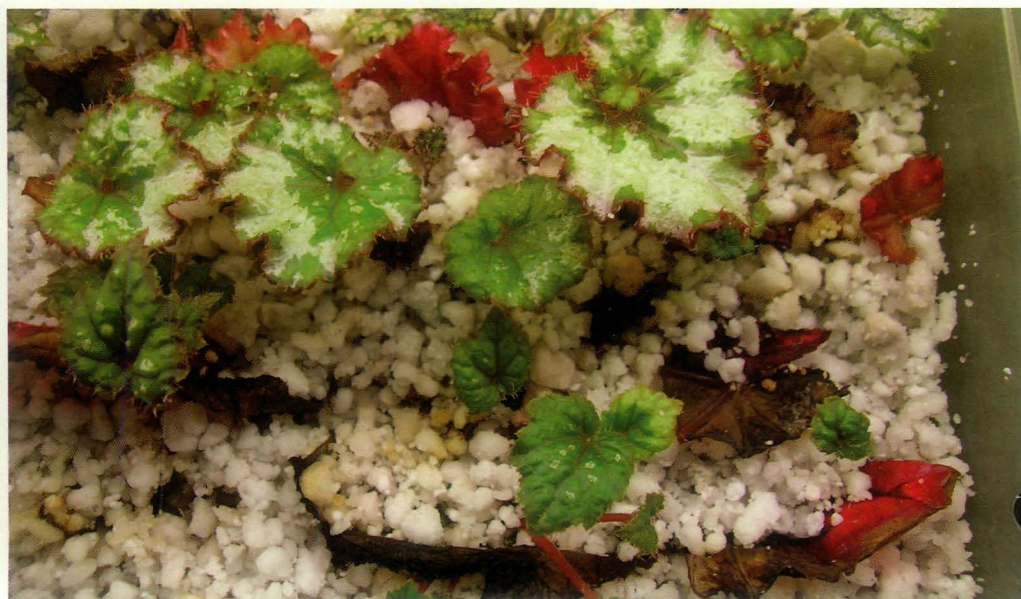


Making More Rex Begonias

Top: Two clear plastic shoeboxes used for propagating Rex begonias. The one on the left is filled with perlite and has a variety of rex begonia plantlets started from leaf wedges. These are ready to be potted up. The box on the right shows overcrowded seedlings of begonias and gesneriads ready for attention and separating.

Below: A close up of the tiny Rex begonia plants propagated from wedge cuttings.

Photos by Michael Kartuz



The Use of Social Media

by Greg Sytch, Horticultural Correspondent

Social media outlets have become quite the rage. Why not with begonias? Recently I have perused some of the

In the Mailbox

sites available, and while the information can prove to be basic, the photos are useful. Many of the growers in GardenWeb post photos of their begonias, and you can compare them to yours to see if you have the correct name or label.

Have a question? Post it and get quick responses. One of the useful tools is that a grower may be in your area, or grow under similar conditions. I grow outdoors, in Central Florida, under shade cloth - much different than someone in Michigan in a greenhouse. My light conditions are very strong, the climate varies more as we do experience winter, drying winds, thunderstorms and downpours, and so on. In a greenhouse, conditions are more stable. In Michigan, you heat a lot. In Florida, only a few nights even require protection. So, the responses may be more useful than a general statement that I can provide.

Do go to Google, and check out the many sites at your fingertips, including our own Yahoo Group. They are all free and so valuable to answer your questions.

QUICK TIPS:

Charcoal

Charcoal is a great additive to your potting mixes. They come in several different sizes, from tiny pieces to larger chunks. I use the tiny pieces in my begonia mix for drainage and to keep the soil sweet (which means to help prevent the peat base from getting

old and sour). The larger pieces are useful in growing orchids. You can check out several suppliers or go to eBay and search the Home and Garden section. Perhaps a local greenhouse supply house may also carry it. Charcoal is so useful in so many different ways.

Magnesium Sulfate

Something I often advocate. By purchasing the powder form and mixing it in your potting mix, this ingredient helps stabilize the green, lush color in your plants. I use a good handful for a 10-gallon tub and mix it in well.

If you have any questions or comments, please do feel free to contact me at: gystch@cs.com.

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Greetings from a Parallel Universe

*By Thomas Mirenda, Orchid
Collection Specialist,
Smithsonian Institution
Photos by BJ Ramsay*

Begonia growers beware! Since you are already carrying a type of 'plant fever' having succumbed to the fascinating and astonishing, not to mention highly addictive, world of begonias, I believe you are likely equally vulnerable to some other horticultural addictions. Many of you may already have dabbled in the dangerous worlds of gesneriads, bonsai, bromeliads, bulbs, cactus and succulents, carnivores, etc. The possibilities are endless with so many compelling and rewarding plant groups to try. But I'm here to save you some time and effort and steer you towards your ultimate plant-growing destiny---The parallel universe of ORCHIDS.

Yes, that's right, those picky, exotic, reputedly difficult plants with the extraordinary flowers. Don't believe the negative hype! If you are successful with begonias then there are many great orchids that you should be able to grow and flower to perfection. Probably all of you at one time or another have tried to grow a *Phalaenopsis* orchid since they are now ubiquitous commodities at Safeway and Home Depot. In fact you may even be bored with such commonly available orchids. It is my purpose here



Top: *Aerangis luteo-alba* var. *rhodosticta*
Bottom: *Cischweinfia dasyandra*

to expose you to some of the incredible diversity within this largest of plant families and to tempt you with a strangely compelling array of colors shapes and fragrances that you won't find among your begonias, as wonderful as they are. Just think of me as your friendly neighborhood orchid 'pusher' from another world, my nefarious goal being to create amongst you a new set of ravenous orchid addicts.

With more than 20,000 species and innumerable hybrids growing in practically every habitat and every continent (except Antarctica, of course), orchids are arguably the most successful group of flowering plants. This is because they are evolutionarily labile - able to adapt to and take advantage of all the features of their environments - making for plants of endless diversity, bizarre, and often deceptive and manipulative, pollination strategies which in turn result in some truly remarkable and beautiful flowers. While there isn't space here to go into tremendous detail of the 20,000+ species, I thought I'd 'reel you in' slowly with a few wonderful, reasonably easy to grow orchids of modest dimensions (and prices) to get you hooked---oops, I mean---started. (Evil laughter.)

Aerangis and *Angraecum*: If you are one of the gazillion plant enthusiasts that have tried to grow a *Phalaenopsis* then these delightful African genera will seem somewhat familiar to you. With leaves like a miniature *Phalaenopsis*, *Aerangis* species have far more interesting flowers, often resembling birds in flight. Usually white and bearing long tubular nectar spurs, most *Aerangis* evolved to take advantage of the 'night crew', mostly moths, as their pollinators. Their pale colors, nectaries and heady nocturnal fragrances make them elegant and intriguing subjects for cultivation. Generally epiphytic, as are most tropical orchids, they still adapt well to pot

culture as long as they are in a quick drying medium with excellent drainage properties. If white flowers bore you, many species have pink tinted flowers and my favorite, the striking *A. rhodosticta*, is cream with a brilliant red spot in the center of the flower. The related *Angraecums* have similar pollination strategies and there are many wonderful miniature plants, such as the awesome *A. distichum* with its triangular imbricating foliage and fragrant crystalline flowers.

Cattleyas: Most of us think of large, foofy 1950s corsages when this famous genus is mentioned, but in recent years *Cattleyas* have been reclassified and now contain many smaller, more subtle and manageable species among their ranks. Previously known as Brazilian *Laelias*, species such as *C. pumila* and *C. sincorana* have wonderful cattleya-like flowers that completely dwarf the miniature plants they emerge from. If you can provide cool growing conditions, (70 to 75 degree days and 55 to 60 degree nights), you can grow the spectacular red flowered species (previous genus *Sophronitis*) that are adapted for hummingbird pollination. Their luscious red flowers and tubular lips are perfect lures for these birds. But do not try these if your growing area gets hot in the summer months, as they cannot handle the heat.

Dendrobium: Okay, this is a huge genus with incredible diversity within it. Some are giant plants, but I'll just mention a couple of the smaller jewel-like species. *D. jenkinsii* which is best grown on a mount, but is tough and will thrive in pot of well drained medium, makes relatively large yellow-orange, honey scented blossoms in the early spring. *D. dichaeoides*, from New Guinea, is semi-deciduous with its brilliant pink flowers appearing on the previous year's leafless canes. Though diminutive, a well-grown plant can have

hundreds of flowers at once. *Dendrobium laevifolium* is a warmer growing miniature with long lasting purple flowers of great beauty and easy culture. One great feature of *Dendrobiums* is their propensity to produce keikis (adventitious growths), which eventually develop their own root systems and are easily detached and shared with unsuspecting friends. (More evil laughter)

Oncidium alliance: Also known as 'dancing lady' orchids, this group has recently been embraced by hybridizers and many fine, lovely and easy-to-grow, large flowered 'creatures' have emerged from this breeding. You can find these now at most garden centers and I recommend them highly. But personally, my heart has always been drawn to the obscure genera and species in this group that are smaller and in their own ways, 'crazy' beautiful. Take the genus *Cischweinfia* for example. Okay so some orchid names are unpronounceable tongue twisters. So what! A *Cischweinfia* by any other name would smell as sweet! Whatever you decide to call it, this delight of a genus is super easy to grow, flowers prolifically, often twice per year, and grows quickly

into dividable specimens easily shared with friends. (Malevolent chortling!) *C. sheehanae*, with its impish tawny flowers and *C. dasyandra* with its lovely pink lips are excellent compact windowsill subjects. *Sigmatostalix*, (I know, another tongue twister) has mostly smaller, thimble-sized plants with amazingly complex flowers. An imaginative grower once described the flowers of one species as resembling a row of yellow flying geese, wearing purple skirts, and carrying trays of hors d'oeuvres! Who wouldn't want such flowers on their windowsill? Another tiny *Oncid* genus, *Macroclinium* produces umbels of spiky flowers, which remind me of intricate crystal chandeliers hanging off of lovely fan-shaped blades of foliage. These genera will often re-bloom on the same spikes for several years so they should never be removed unless they turn completely brown. Make no mistake; these are tiny but intriguing little plants that need just a little bit of attention each day.

Bulbophyllums: Another huge genus with many compelling species within it, *Bulbophyllum* is a pan-tropical genus occurring in the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Most of them, frankly, are really weird. But since you've willingly read this far, I will now drag you down this strange and perverse 'back alley' of the orchid world. Many bulbos (a term of affection for these oddities) are brood site mimics. In other words, to bugs, they seem like a good place to lay their eggs. Unfortunately, most insects like to lay their eggs in truly disgusting places such as animal carcasses



or animal poop. Therefore most bulbos have strangely shaped and colored flowers with, well, I won't call them fragrances...perhaps 'odors' is a better descriptor here. Nonetheless the flowers are quite intriguing and often strangely beautiful. One of the best is *B. echinolabium* with its 12 inch long flowers and *B. blumei* (pictured on back cover) with its masdevallia-like flowers and, whose stench is barely noticeable!

Jewel orchids and other terrestrials: By now, many of you hard-core begonians are probably saying to yourselves; Well these orchids have interesting flowers, but flowers are temporary, and when out of bloom can't compare to the year round beauty of begonia leaves. All right, I'll give you that. But there are some orchids with spectacular leaves. Most of them are warm climate terrestrial plants growing in deep shade. *Ludisia*, *Dossinia*, *Anoechtochilus* and a few others have astonishing dendritic leaf patterns scrawled with red silver and gold venations rivaling the showiest of Rex begonias! While most of these are grown for their lovely leaves rather than flowers, some terrestrial orchids can wow with

their flowers as well. *Habenarias* display amazing, intense floral colors including peachy pinks, yellows, reds and oranges. Recently a most remarkable species has come into general cultivation. Even though the flowers are mostly white, the lip of *H. medusae* is so extraordinary with its radiating serpentine fringe that is among the most sought after of plants in all of horticulture now. It is truly awesome. The trick with *Habenarias* is that they are deciduous and need a dry rest in winter. Excessive cold or water while they are sleeping will easily rot them. So it is best to just leave them completely untended through the 5-month dormant season. Imagine beautiful flowering plants that need absolutely no care for half the year! What more could one ask! So, have I convinced you to try growing a few orchids yet? I think the plants speak for themselves more eloquently than I ever could. I'm

Opposite page, left: *Cattleya sincorana*
Right: *Bulbophyllum echinolabium* Fly Delight

This page, left: *Habenaria medusa*
Center: *Dendrobium dichaeoides*
Right: *Sigmatostalix eliae*





just your lowly pusher and truly, I have no real evil intent here. Indeed there are far worse things you could be addicted to. Just like there are begonia societies in your community, you'll find the parallel universe of orchid growers is there as well, probably meeting at the same botanic garden or community center where your begonia society meets. Yes we are everywhere! All around you! There is no escape. So you may as well just enjoy them and their endless diversity of beauty form and fragrance. If you need emotional support for your new orchid affliction, there are many like-minded addicts to commiserate with at the American Orchid Society as well as myriad sources to feed your new hunger for these fascinating plants. Welcome to planet Orchid!

Thomas Mirenda writes two monthly columns for *Orchids*, Journal of the American Orchid Society. He also grows orchids and does orchid exhibits for the Smithsonian Institute. Thomas travels extensively - always in search of more orchids.

Top: *Macroclinium aurorae*
Bottom: *Dendrobium jenkinsii*



B. 'Pinafore Sport'

'Pinafore Sport' is a sport of *B. 'Pinafore'* which was originated by Logee's Greenhouses in the late 1940's. A "sport" is when a leaf or a stem of a plant is taken from a specimen plant and the offspring of the leaf or stem is not the same as the original plant. This is not an every day occurrence but does happen. *B. 'Pinafore'* is a light spotted, low-growing cane with salmon-colored flowers. Most likely what happened is that a specimen of *B. 'Pinafore'* created a stem, or several stems, that were not spotted. Propagation of those stems happened and the new growth on the rooted plants did not revert back to *B. 'Pinafore'*, then subsequent propagation of the sport remained the same - hence you have a new variety. *B. 'Erythrophylla'* (the common Beefsteak Begonia) also has two sports: *B. 'Erythrophylla Helix'* and *B. 'Erythrophylla Bunchii'*. -From Charles Jaros

This *B. 'Pinafore Sport'* (pictured above) is quite beautiful in my garden right now. It grows well in our 106° temperatures here in Plano, Texas. I grow it in a hanging basket and it has produced a parade of constant blooms for me. Luckily, it tolerates being a little dry at times. Grown and photographed by Charles Henthorne

A Branch Project

By the Margaret Lee Branch of the ABS

By Dean Turney, Encinitas, CA

For the past 13 years the Margaret Lee Branch has managed the Clayton M. Kelly Seed Fund for the ABS. In 1998 we decided as a Branch, with a major push by Thelma O'Reilly, to take on the Seed Fund as a Branch project. Eleanor Calkins agreed to be the Fund administrator with the rest of the Branch packing and testing the seeds. As expected, Eleanor did most of the work: storing and packing seeds, filling and shipping orders. In 2001 Michael Ludwig relieved Eleanor as the administrator and assumed all of Eleanor's tasks. In 2004 when problems arose with the US Mail Service not receiving and not delivering orders, we split the administration position into two major positions: Michael as head of storing and packaging the seeds and Ed Bates as head of correspondence. The rest of the Branch would help pack seeds at our meetings, test seeds for germination, and grow the seedlings to verify identification. Ed completed his term as head of correspondence in 2007 and I, Dean Turney, replaced Ed. Since that time, I have processed all orders, kept records on each order, and shipped each order. This year, I also took over as the treasurer for the Seed Fund.

We publish a complete list of all seeds,

species and varieties, available through the Seed Fund in the January/ February issue of *The Begonian*. Then, we highlight new arrivals in each subsequent issue of *The Begonian*. One may order seeds from the current issue or any previous issue during the current year. I keep records for each order: species requested, species sent, the date the order was sent, species requested but out of stock, and species requested but not listed. If we can locate or receive a species that was not available at the time the order was received, we can notify the requestor at a later date that it is now available. I have been able to include the unfilled species requested in subsequent orders, especially if the member has a credit on the books.

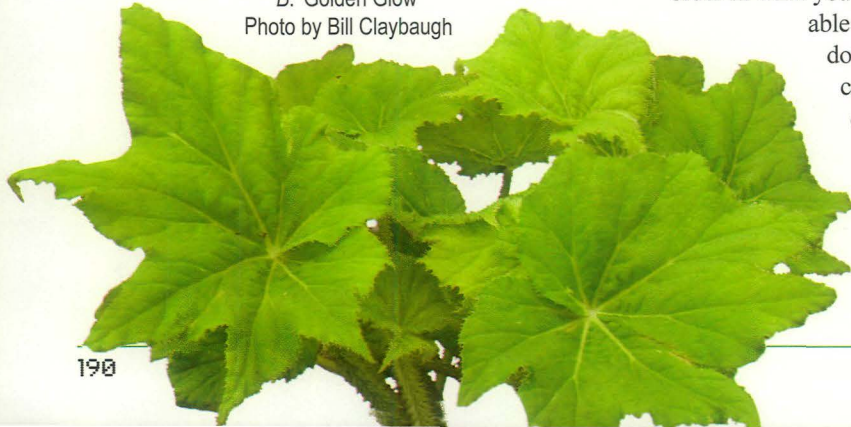
Since I receive the packaged seeds at our monthly Branch meetings, the timing as to when your order arrives and personal life events can have a great influence on when the order fulfilled. We meet the fourth Saturday of each month. I try to forward requests to Michael ahead of the meeting in order to allow time for packing the seeds. If the request is not ready when we meet, it can take till the next meeting for the seed packets to be in my possession. So, as a rule allow four to six weeks for delivery. If you have not received your

order in what you think is a reason-

able amount of time, do not hesitate to contact me (dean@deansmail.us). We still have a few orders being lost in the mail. One

*continued
on next page*

B. 'Golden Glow'
Photo by Bill Claybaugh



Clayton M. Kelly Seed Fund

The Margaret Lee Branch
San Diego County, CA

The seed fund is a service to members only. It is a privilege of your membership. Please self-pollinate your species begonias, collect the seeds and send them to the seed fund. We depend on your contributions of seeds to make a wider variety of species available to the members.

► New seeds from Beatrice Huckriede:

B. kenworthyae
B. 'Lindleyana'
B. sericoneura
B. sikkimensis

► New Seeds from Rob Cullison:

B. fusca (open pollinated)

Thanks for your contributions.

► New Seeds from Pat Maley Belkham:

B. 'Bonfire'
B. crassicaulis
B. vitifolia
B. 'Shanzi'
B. 'Sparkle'

► New seeds from Joan Campbell:

B. geranioides



A Branch Project -continued

arrived a month later at the same time as the second order. Others just disappear. As noted above, we have records as to when they are placed in the hands of the Postal Service and are always willing to try again.

The Seed Fund is a service of the ABS for its members only. The breadth of the species available depends on the membership. Currently, we have an international group of fewer than ten members regularly contributing seeds to the Seed Fund. They are the lifeblood of the Seed Fund. The other important component has to be those who are willing to order seeds from the Seed Fund to increase their begonia collections. This year the Seed Fund has shipped 341 packets of seeds to its members and raised approximately \$1,000.00 for the ABS. By members being willing to grow species and contributing seeds to the Seed Fund, we as an organization are saving begonia species that are becoming endangered in the wild. And what greater joy can a plant person experience than that of seeing what looked like dust grow into a beautiful blooming mature plant.

Packets of seeds are \$2.00. Very rare seeds and newly collected seeds will be \$3.00 or more per packet when noted. California residents please add 8.75% sales tax. All orders must be accompanied by check or money order, payable in US funds ONLY to the Clayton M. Kelly Seed Fund.

Please send your order with payment to:

**American Begonia Society,
Clayton M. Kelly Seed Fund, Dean
Turney, 467 Fulvia Street, Encinitas,
CA 92024. E-address: dean @
deansmail.us**

Cost of mailing: US only: 1-12 packets
\$1; 13-24, **\$1.35;** 25-36, **\$1.71;** 37-48 (2
cans), **\$2.30;** 49-60, **\$2.66.** Canada only:
1-12 packets, **\$1.10;** 13-24, **\$1.46;** 25-36,
\$1.82; 37-48 (2 cans) **\$2.35;** 49-60, **\$2.71.**
Mexico only: 1-12 packets, **\$1.15;** 13-24,
\$1.51; 25-36, **\$1.87;** 37-48 (2 cans),
\$2.50; 49-60, **\$2.81.** All other international
mail: 1-12 packets, **\$1.85;** 13-24, **\$2.68;**
25-36, **\$3.68;** 37-48, **\$4.68;** 49-60, **\$5.68.**

DISCLAIMER: The seeds distributed by the seed fund are identified as received from the donors. The species names (in italics) reported here are correct based on the latest information from *BEGONIACEAE*, Ed. 2; Golding, and Wasshausen. Hybrid names are made consistent with the *ABS Check List of Begonia Hybrids* edited by Howard Berg dated 9/13/2005.

NEW: *Westchester Cooks, Collected Potluck Recipes*

Edited by Janet Brown. Dec. 2010

Superb collection of recipes from the fabulous cooks of the Westchester Branch and the American Begonia Society, including Irene Nuss, Mary Sakamoto, Evelyn Weidner, Virginia Ziesenhenne, Linda Tamblyn, Thelma O'Reilly and many others. Limited number. \$12.00

Unidentified Species Listing, August 2010

By Mary Bucholtz & Charles Jaros, Co-Directors

This update includes previous listings through U520. The new material begins with U521 and ends with U603. Loose-leaf format for easy addition of new material. Many pictures. Notebook not included. Only 7 left! Domestic: \$40.00 International: \$50.00

Raising Cane: Experiences in Growing the Species Cane Begonias

By Freda M. Holley

A wonderful work on the cane species with color photographs, by the past editor of The Begonian. \$15.00

Note Cards from the Jack Golding Collection

Eight cards with envelopes, each card a different begonia species. This collection of botanical illustrations is part of a series of renderings by Jack's daughter, Marilyn Golding White. The cards were used as Jack's Season's Greetings cards to his friends and associates. A great gift for your begoniad friends. \$15.00

12 Postcard Packet, Taiwan Begonias

Published by Dr. Ching-I Peng. Beautiful pictures of Taiwanese Begonia Species. 2010 \$5.00

12 Postcards of Begonia Section *Coelocentrum* including *B. pengii* and *B. masoniana*.

Published by Dr. Ching-I Peng. 2009 \$5.00

2010 Calendar, Taiwan Begonia by Dr.

Ching-I Peng.

Wonderful timeless pictures of Asian begonia species. \$5.00

(Last chance for the four items above.)

Begoniaceae, Edition 2, Part I: Annotated Species List, Part II: Illustrated Key, Abridgement & Supplement

Jack Golding & Dieter C. Wasshausen, 2002, Smithsonian Institution, Volume 43: 1-289. Invaluable reference work for begonia species. Domestic \$55.00

International \$65.00

Seeing Begonia

By Jack Golding 2003, Revised 2005, Jack Golding's last work.

"....dedicated to the many who look at their Begonia but do not see the details."

\$15.00

Begonia Hybridizing: A Primer

By Freda M. Holley, 2007

An invaluable source book for the beginning or advanced begonia hybridizer. \$15.00

Begonia Notes

By Rudolf Ziesenhenne

Reissued by the Thelma O'Reilly Reprint Fund. Originally printed in the Santa Barbara Branch, La Begonia Barbareña. \$15.00

Begonias - 1984 Update

By Mildred L. Thompson, reissued 2009

"An addendum for particular portions of *Begonias: The Complete Reference Guide* (Times Books, 1981). Includes species and hybrids and many pictures. \$18.00

Begonias of Peninsular Malaysia

By Ruth Kiew

A magnificent work with glorious pictures. Domestic \$55.00 International \$65.00

The Begonian on DVD,

3 DVDs - #1 1934-1958, #2 1959-1979, #3 1980-2005 \$79.00

Individual DVDs \$33.00

Two DVDs. Note which two when you order. \$54.00

continued on next page

A Wee Bit About the Bookstore

By Janet Brown, ABS Bookstore Chairman

After a day of going through old Begonians both with the hard copies and *The Begonians* on DVD I found a few interesting facts about how the ABS Book Store got started. In the February 1942 Begonian on page 30 there is an article by Rudolf Ziesenhenne, Research Director. Rudy had been the Nomenclature Director and had just been assigned the Research Director post. In that article he describes the duties of the Librarian.

For several years after that the books accumulated by the Librarian were offered on a lending library format. Evidently this didn't work out too well with the usual problem that people tend not to return the books when they have to be mailed back and forth. After a while the Librarian began selling the books. I enclose a sample of the offerings from May 1968 with some very famous begonia names represented.

In the early 1980s the Book Store became a separate entity and the Library drifted away. Probably some of you who read this will know the whole story.

In the 1990s the Book Store was going strong and books were available at most of the Conventions. Then it began to fall off and there were not many new items. Probably the whole operation was kept going and saved by Ann Salisbury who oversaw the printing of new books by Freda Holley and others. Ann saw to it that the profits of the Book Store went to the Thelma O'Reilly Publication Fund and the ABS Conservation Fund.

continued from previous page

To order: Prices include shipping unless otherwise noted (international). Send check payable to the American Begonia Society and your order to Carol Notaras, 2567 Green St., San Francisco 94123 or order online at begonias.org by PayPal. For questions and availability, email or call Book Store Chairman Janet Brown, begoniabrown@yahoo.com 310-670-4471.

At the present time we have an excellent stock of reference works and sales have been brisk. The new U Number book by Bucholtz & Jaros has almost sold out. We try very hard to get the orders out in a timely fashion but do hope that members realize that we are definitely not Amazon. Please check the current list and add to your collections. We will be trying to bring you new works as well as keeping the older titles in print.

Support your Book Store and remember its founder Rudolf Ziesenhenne.



A.B.S. LIBRARY BOOKSTORE

The following selection of books are FOR SALE

- *The Complete Book of Gardening.....\$4.95
Under Lights by Elvin McDonald
- *Gesneriads And How To Grow Them..\$7.95
by Peggy Shultz
- *Rex Begonias As House Plants.....\$1.00
by Virginia Withee
- *All About Begonias\$5.95
by Bernice Brillmayer
- *Begonias Slanted Toward The\$3.00
Beginner by Dorothy Behrends
- *So Say The Experts by Ruth Pease\$2.00
Classification Guide—Compiled by\$1.25
the Westchester Branch, A.B.S.
- *Ferns We Grow by Sylvia Leatherman \$3.85
and Dorothy Behrends
- The Begonian—Complete reprints\$6.00
of the four years 1934 to 1937
- The Begonian—1967-1960 25c each
1959-1950 40c each
1949-1939 50c each
- *Begonian Binders\$1.50
A.B.S. on the cover.
- *Calif. residents, add 5 % tax on these items.

Send your orders to:

MRS. LUCILE WRIGHT, LIBRARIAN
4508 West 133rd Street,
Hawthorne, Calif. 90250

Volume 35 • May, 1968

Above: ABS bookstore list from 1968

07

How to Water Your Plants

By Wally Wagner, Salem, OR

More plants die from over or under watering than any other abuse. The watering procedure I use will solve that problem.

First you need to purchase a good moisture meter. They are available at all garden shops and some big box stores. Before you make the trip to the store purchase a 16-ounce plastic container of orange juice. Rinse with water and then fill with clean water and take it to the store where you plan to purchase the moisture meter. When you find the meter in a store, ask the salesperson to open the package and put the moisture meter probe in your bottle of water. Why? Because I checked four different meters at four stores before I found one that worked!

On the way home stop at your local grocery store and purchase a package or more of wooden BBQ skewers. Buy as many as you have plants to check. The skewers are cheap and will be reusable. When you get home, dip the non-pointed ends of the skewers in red paint (or any other color that you have). Stick the pointed ends of the skewers into a container of soil or sand to dry.

Now you are ready to water your potted plants, both indoor and outdoor. Put the moisture meter probe into the soil of a plant toward the root zone, close to the bottom of the container and read the meter. Exceptions are when the plant has a tuber, rhizome, or a bulbous base like *Begonia dregeii*. Do not pierce the tuber or bulbous base. Remember that cacti and succulents can survive for an extended time without water.

If the needle is anywhere in the red section on the moisture meter then stick one of the skewers, pointed end down, into the pot. Again, do not pierce the tuber or bulbous base of the plant. Do the above procedure with all your potted plants before you begin watering. Now for the watering: Find each plant that has a red skewer in it. Water that plant. Continue until all plants with red skewers are watered. When finished watering, take all the skewers out of the pots and keep for the next time you check the plants.

This method is fast, accurate, and sure to keep your plants healthy, not dying from faulty watering techniques.

Top: Find a good, and working, moisture meter. **Second,down:** You'll also need plenty of wooden BBQ skewers. **Third down:** Soil registering in the red zone on the face of the meter needs to be watered. **Bottom:** Plants with dry soil are marked with a painted skewer. When you have checked all your plants it's time to water those with the skewers.



Getting My Adopted Species, *B. scharffii*, Circulated

By Bernie Wiener, Havertown, PA

My adopted species was discovered in Brazil in 1888. It is shrub-like and covered with very light pink hairs. Pale pink flowers appear from October to July. I have been growing *B. scharffii* for about 15 years and it has been a major part of my begonia presentations, which are given at the Philadelphia Flower Show, garden clubs, and arboretums (Barnes, Jenkins, and Scott). I give the attendees a starter plant to take home as something to remember me by and, hopefully they will start growing other begonias.

I am always taking cuttings because if I neglect pruning the mature plant it begins to look ratty. Therefore, I am sure to have a good supply of starter plants in my greenhouse for future usage. I find that the easiest, fastest and the cleanest method for starting my SOS plant is by using Oasis Root Cubes. As you can see in the photo there is a hole in the middle of the root cube, which is perfect to insert a cutting. These cubes offer a firm base to keep the cutting erect.

Using a shrub-like begonia as a give away makes a perfect plant to demonstrate how to propagate cuttings. I use the largest cube (1 1/2") making it is possible to stick two cuttings into one cube. Once the roots form I can place the entire cube into a 3" plastic container or divide the cube to make two plants. I recommend the following types of soil to use: Scott's Metro-mix 560 containing ScottsCoiir, Fafard Mix #52 or Premier Pro-Mix BX. If you are using any one of these mixes for propagating add some super coarse perlite. Transplanting the rooted cutting into the cube has a great advantage since you do not remove the cutting from the cube so there is no shock to the plant and roots form much more quickly.



B. scharffii prefers morning sun since stronger sunlight bleaches out the green surface of the

leaves. I use a liquid fertilizer with 9-16-9 only during the growing season and then every 4 to 6 weeks. Placing three starter plants in an 8" hanging basket makes a very nice presentation since the plants will quickly begin to cascade. During this past summer my greenhouse went up to 110 degrees but with good ventilation and keeping the gravel floor wet the plants stayed alive. My adopted begonia has made quite an impression with my indoor garden friends - what with the different colors on the leaves plus the hairy surface. It is a wonderful plant to get a beginner started in growing begonias.

Save Our Species is a great feature of ABS and I hope more members will join the participant list (<http://www.begonias.org/SOS/SOS.htm>) that appears on the ABS website.

REFERENCE

Propagating Begonias Without Using Soil Mixture by Bernie Wiener *The Begonian* Sept/Oct 2009, pg. 182.

Above: *B. scharffii* in Oasis root cube.
Photo by Diane Mattis

After the Hurricane

By Michael Higson, New Orleans, LA

I came across my first begonia, or, I should say my first begonia in this country since I myself am a British transplant, in a side yard of an old house on Governor Nicholls Street in New Orleans. The yard was overhung by tall trees and was an untidy jumble of plants, with just a few being in flower. It was June 1983. What really struck me was the vitality of these plants with their pendulous clusters of flowers so tolerant of the heat and high humidity.

With the passing of May many gardens in New Orleans revert to a simple kind of landscape care - grass and privet maintenance along with the occasional crepe myrtle, caladiums and vinca. These are the staples. But I was looking, as I travelled around the city, for plants that excelled in this climate (yes, it is just within the subtropical zone). Gradually I did find some, in ones and twos generally speaking, never a whole garden full. I learned by some sixth sense to recognize begonias.

Sometime after that initial discovery on Governor Nicholls Street I was again doing restoration carpentry work on the house and the begonias were still there. This time around I was sure I was looking at cane begonias, somewhat similar in size and blooming habit to *B. 'Irene Nuss'*. What is remarkable is that I still have some progeny from the cuttings I made then, though the name of that plant remains a mystery. I do remember a few of the Begonias cuttings I acquired in the early days, notably a Beefsteak begonia, a tall growing semperflorens (18 - 20") and *B. "Pink Jade"* which is quite tall.

Nothing since these early, tentative discoveries, has dissuaded me from the belief that begonias can flourish in this

habitat and achieve some popularity - if only people knew! I have tended to get carried away with my mission of developing awareness for the begonia. I have assumed if a rank amateur such as myself can grow begonias in this climate, anyone can. But I am being naive. New Orleans,



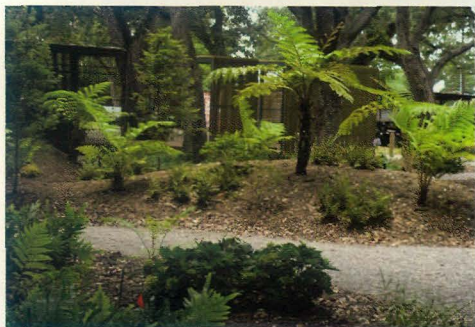
Above: One of my first New Orleans begonias. (Editor's note: This plant may be *B. 'Lucerna'* aka 'Corallina de Lucerna' according to Tom Keepin and Charles Jaros.)

Opposite page: Two views of the New Orleans Botanical Gardens since Hurricane Katrina.

and I am speaking here of the "old city", is notable for its shade trees, its Live Oaks and magnolias but is short on gardens. Hemmed in by the river and the lake, land has always been scarce. Houses begin where the sidewalk stops. Greenhouses are notable only for their absence. There are few plant shows or public venues for learning about exotic plants. There are exceptions. There is a coffee table sized book that's been out for years

all about notable New Orleans gardens. But these are not what you see when you drive around. What one does see is an abundance of what might be taken for exotica in other places - flowering vines and shrubs too numerous to catalog, Birds of Paradise plants and Crepe Myrtle trees in full bloom on street after street. It's the herbaceous plants that are missing.

Fortunately though the one notable exception is the New Orleans Botanical Gardens that is less than a five-minute walk from the Museum of Art with its exceptional Sculpture Garden. I took a few potted begonias for possible inclusion in the Garden's brand new planting area, that the head gardener, Kathy McNamara, is developing for tropical plants. Tall-growing trees shelter this area that sits on perhaps a third of an acre, which also now supports a varied population of ferns. It is close to the Conservatory where there have long been several begonias varieties prominently placed near the entrance. Sadly, Hurricane Katrina destroyed the Garden's stock of begonias so now the collection must begin again. Cuttings and plantlets will certainly be welcomed. If you are interested I would suggest e-mailing Kathy at: kmcnamara@nocp.org.



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Palos Verdes Begonia Show

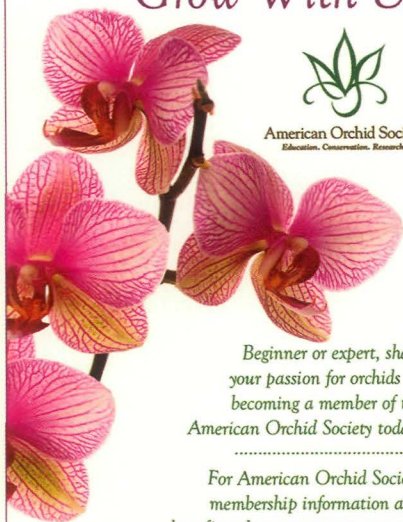
The show is **September 24 and 25** at the South Coast Botanic Garden, 26300 Crenshaw Blvd, Palos Verdes, CA 90274. We are having a display and sale both days with beautiful member plants and many plants to purchase. We are ordering plants for our sale from three specialty vendors. The setting of our show is the magnificent South Coast Botanic Garden. Free admission to our show with gate ticket purchase.

Carol Knight,
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