

Appendix E to 'Down to Earth – With Begonias.'

PLANNING THE GARDEN.

So you are thinking of planning a garden, or giving your present one a make-over? Let me tell you how we did this in the Sydney Botanic Gardens, us being a group of volunteers without a garden architect or a landscape gardener amongst us, just people who love gardens and begonias in particular. I feel sure that the principles that we embraced would apply to any garden, anywhere.

Take a garden bed – in our case a large garden bed some 30 metres (100 feet) x 10 metres (35 feet) - in fact Bed 31 in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney - and take a long look at what we have. Check the soil for suitability – is the drainage right? Is the pH acceptable? Will begonias grow here? In fact we have found that begonias will grow well in most soils, and Bed 31 seems to be OK if maybe a little on the heavy side. Put in hand work by the Garden's experts on an irrigation system, settling for overhead sprays.

There are no shrubs of any moment, in fact just a few weeds instead, but some beautiful trees throwing a variety of shadows. Spend some days studying these shadow patterns and working out how they will vary through the seasons, for these patterns will govern the begonia types we use in each area of the garden. Produce a list of suitable begonias of which we can obtain seeds or cuttings and commence the task of propagation in readiness for planting – in this case we raise some 2,000 plants comprising about 90 species and 48 cultivars.

Decide on the theme for the garden. After much discussion we settle for a number of areas, not garden rooms in the accepted sense but areas of suitable plants according to aspect and the depth, or lack of, shade. We want more than begonias – we need to show them in a normal garden setting with other plants which will complement them. Discussion with the Senior Hort (Gardens-speak for Horticulturist) who is our Gardens liaison and available to us throughout this formative stage ensures his complete co-operation and he undertakes to select and obtain a range of suitable plants.

The shade patterns led us to select areas for a Shrubbery, a Shade Garden, a Full-sun Garden, a Foliage Garden and our version of a begonia based Cottage Garden and our Senior Hort agrees with our concept. Now we can start to form our garden areas and consultation with him reveals that there is enough money available for some rockwork to give the gardens shape and character. An internal path is laid out through the centre of the garden, winding between the trees, to be eventually surfaced with those