

indispensable bark and wood chips, and giving visitors ready access to view all the plantings. Finally the rocks are emplaced, a dressing of compost is dug in and the garden is ready for planting. It is October 2006, a little later in the season for planting than I would like but satisfactory nonetheless.

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Bed 31 is home to some beautiful trees, the oldest being a venerable flowering ash, *Fraxinus ornus*, which we thought was nearly dead, but which has now taken a new lease on life and is playing a full part in providing summer shade. A huge Chilean wine palm, *Jubea Chilensis*, is a source of great interest to all our visitors, soaring many metres upwards on its vast trunk which resembles the foreleg of some gigantic elephant; it stands adjacent to one of the most popular of the Garden's trees, *Backhousia citridora*, whilst several *Crepe Myrtles* make interesting patterns with their fascinating trunks and branches.

In such a setting we began to plant our gardens, being mindful throughout to balance eventual growth habits with foliage shape and size and colour, together with flower colours and flowering seasons. We wanted to ensure that there would be begonias in flower in every one of the garden areas throughout the year.

The Shrubbery is in full and part sun and here we planted cane-like begonias including *Bs. aconitifolia*, *angularis*, *coccinea*, *undulata* and 'Sophie Cecile', the unusual rhizomatous, *B. diadema*, together with such beautiful garden gems as *canna lilies*, *tree dahlias*, *vireya rhododendrons*, 'Red Tower' *gingers* and *philodendrons*. All these cane-likes are planted in clumps of like types, interspersed with the other plants mentioned and the result a year later is most pleasing indeed. Begonias seem to thrive on close company. The provision of a ration of controlled release fertilizer in each planting hole has no doubt helped with the very strong growth of everything we have planted.

The Shrubbery abuts our version of the Cottage Garden – a delightful collection of this and that including *Bs. polyantha*, *lobata* (climbing on a frame), 'Coral West', 'Yorke's Delight', 'Hitomi', 'Shirayuki' and many more, together with a few old favourites from traditional Cottage Garden plantings. There is also a garden seat dedicated to me courtesy of the RBG – a gesture very much appreciated.

The Cottage Garden is divided from the Foliage Garden by a hedge of *B. arborescens* var. *oxyphylla* which is doing very well indeed. A begonia hedge? Yes indeed, and after several years of growth it certainly resembles traditional hedges, being kept in shape by liberal use of garden shears. I really do believe that this is a 'first' among begonia plantings anywhere.

Our Foliage Garden stretches for some twelve metres along the eastern edge and is filled with many plants having unusual, interesting or colourful leaves. The Begonias in this garden include such eye