

plantings. There is just one problem: begonias will not tolerate heavy frosts or extremely cold winters and must, in such areas, be grown as potted plants either for indoor or outdoor display but needing winter shelter.

When begonias were introduced into Europe it was quickly realised that they were suitable mainly for indoor growing there due to unsuitable climates and these beautiful plants were relegated to the Botanical Garden hothouses and the conservatories of the wealthy. So began the myth that begonias are fussy plants which need to be grown under glass, except for a few hardier types which could be used to decorate an indoor corner; a myth which unfortunately persists to this day. Over the years so many gardeners have missed out on this source of beauty and delight simply because those who should have known better just didn't care to discover the truth.

The cultivation and development of the begonia family, and the production of new cultivars, is today mainly pursued in several of the world's great botanic gardens and by members of Begonia Societies in the USA, Canada, Great Britain, France, Belgium, Japan and Australia. However, despite being one of the world's favourite indoor plants, they have not been used to any degree, to the best of my knowledge, as landscape plants. To my delight begonias are now being discovered for this purpose by an increasing number of home gardeners who, once they have grown one begonia, clamour for more.

There is one exception to the general lack of awareness of the *Begoniaceae*, and that is with the Tuberous varieties. Hundreds of thousands of these floral beauties are grown both for public display in botanic gardens and for sale as indoor plants, Belgium being one of the largest producers, where many millions of euros are earned each year from the export market. In Australia tuberous begonias feature each year in truly magnificent displays in the Hobart and Ballarat Botanic Gardens and in some public parks, especially at Goulburn and Orange in New South Wales and in many places in Victoria.

Significant collections of begonia species are maintained in the Botanic Gardens at Fort Worth in the USA, Glasgow in Scotland, Montreal in Canada, Hiroshima in Japan, Kunming in the Chinese Peoples Republic and in Le Conservatoire du Begonia in Rochefort, France, amongst others. The species begonia collection in the Sydney Royal Botanic Garden is unique amongst these in that most of our begonias are grown in open gardens rather than being potted plants in traditional hothouse repositories. The collection, although small at this time, is being added to constantly. All such additions are grown on and tested for suitability for outdoor cultivation.

However, there is need for more public institutions to establish these so very important species banks and for more research to be carried out on this little known family of plants. Research is most