

## CHAPTER 7

### A CLOSE LOOK AT EACH BEGONIA GROUP

#### THE CANE-LIKE BEGONIAS

Cane-like begonias are eminently suitable for use as feature plants in any garden scheme, and both species and cultivars are readily available and ideally suited to open garden cultivation; in fact they often grow much better in the open garden than in the traditional pots and tubs to which they are usually consigned. They come in many shapes and sizes, from low growing sprawling or compact types through those of medium height to the very tall ones which grow to 1.8 metres (6 feet) or more, and in many leaf shapes and colours. They mostly like a position in which they receive at least a few hours sunshine each day as in less light they will not flower to perfection, however each plant may behave differently and experimentation is required before the ideal position is found. Don't hesitate to move a begonia many times before this ideal is achieved. Cane-likes need plenty of growing room so that new canes, which come from the root system on the outside of the plant, can develop properly, and because of their comparatively deep root system need a good depth of growing medium, be it in garden or tub. I recommend that when using cane-likes as feature garden plants you plant two or more of the one variety in a clump say 30 cms (or 12 inches) apart; the resulting very full and handsome display will reward you all year long with interesting foliage and beautiful flowers.

The flowering period extends from late spring well into winter, with some being ever-flowering in the right conditions, and the flowers, produced in large cymes, hold on the plant for a very long time, even throughout the winter in hot to mild climates or sheltered positions. They come in white and shades of pink and red, with the occasional orange. Cut foliage is often most suitable for indoor decoration.

Very cold temperatures and frosts will cause leaf drop and in some cases the loss of the upper portion of the plant. However the arrival of warmer spring weather will soon fix that and new growth, which comes both from the root system consisting of one or more new canes each year, and, usually, the topmost node after pruning, will delight you. They will benefit from annual pruning and this is best done in late winter before new growth begins. Shorten the canes to suit your garden scheme and cut above an outward facing node; heavy pruning is acceptable to these garden beauties and up to two thirds may be cut away with no ill effects. The rule of thumb is to prune the cane-likes to the size you want. The cuttings of