

THE RHIZOMATOUS GROUP

Rhizomatous begonias form the largest group in the family and although once considered to be merely indoor plants I have found that they are indeed very well suited for garden cultivation. There are three types of rhizomes to be found amongst the begonias:

- a. ground level plants whose rhizomes grow along the surface of the soil,
- b. those whose rhizomes grow in an upright fashion, and
- c. those whose rhizomes creep beneath the surface of the soil.

They make ideal under-plantings for shrubs such as azaleas, and being shallow rooted will not interfere with the root systems of other plants. Most of the rhizomatous need some degree of shade and many of them are very suitable for planting in that 'difficult' corner where the sun does not penetrate. I particularly like some of the species, such as *B. acetosa* with its large, hirsute, dark green leaves with the rich red undersides, *B. manicata* whose rhizomes grow upright and which produces a mass of pink flowers every spring, and *B. carolineifolia*, a large, sprawling and totally fascinating begonia which has light green compound leaves and huge rhizomes, producing pale pink flowers in profusion for the first two months of spring.

The ground level rhizomes are the most common, and as their rhizomes grow forward the back section dies, with the vigorous part being the growing tip. When garden planted these rhizomatous begonias have a 'life' of two to three years, after which time they are likely to become straggly and unattractive. They should then be replaced with newly propagated plants. If pot grown for a considerable time, say 4 or more years, the rhizomes grow in loops over the edge of the pot and form quite attractive looking plants. However if left in this state too long the plant will wilt and possibly die as there is insufficient rooted rhizome in contact with the soil. To avoid this it is advisable to repot every 2 or 3 years, cutting away the old back portion of the rhizome and replanting the vigorously growing tip.

The upright growing rhizomes should be tip pruned after each flowering (in late spring usually) and the growing tips thus removed can be used as cuttings. When pruning, remove as much of the rhizome as will leave a short plant which will very quickly grow once more into an attractive specimen. Again it is wise to replace these plants every two to three years.

Those begonias whose rhizomes grow beneath the soil surface may need the original plant removed completely as the newly forming growing tips will appear above the surface as new plants.