

I must admit to using them as indoor decoration only during the first flowering period and then buying a new one! I have heard of some people who have had success in planting them in the open garden.

Elatiors benefit from regular (say fortnightly) applications of a water soluble fertiliser. Keep them looking their best by removing any leaves which may turn yellow, although this should not happen if they are kept in a good light level and fertilised regularly. Otherwise they are virtually trouble-free during their long flowering period. Do not stand them in water. Drying out in a constantly air-conditioned or heated environment is not to their liking.

TUBEROUS AND SEMI-TUBEROUS BEGONIAS

Introduction

There's a begonia that has adapted to the coldest of winters by developing a tuber and becoming winter dormant - the fabulous tuberous begonia. This winter dormancy came about when the forebears of the modern day hybrids found their habitat in South America's hinterland being pushed higher and higher as the Andes Mountains were formed and the cold became unbearable. Evolution to the rescue - grow a tuber at the base of your stems to sustain you through the periods when your habitat is snow covered and your leaves and stems have fallen. *Voila* - a winter dormant begonia.

There is a widely held belief that tuberous begonias can only be grown by experts with glass-houses. Not so - the very fact that they are winter dormant makes them ideal plants for cultivation in those places where it is too cold for all the other begonias to survive the winter. The essential conditions are:

- a. summer heat in the 20° to 30°C range and which does not normally exceed 35°C for other than short periods, although simple cooling methods allow this maximum to be extended,
- b. humidity generally above 30% and preferably 10/20% higher although short periods of much drier conditions are acceptable, and
- c. a simple growing environment such as a shade-house where a high level of light is available but also in which the begonias may be protected from too much direct sunlight and strong winds. A translucent roof is desirable to protect the blooms from heavy rain but to admit the essential light. Some direct morning sunlight is beneficial.

You still want to grow them but haven't a shade-house? Well now, there is a range of tuberous begonias specially bred for you, dwarf plants but still bearing those large blooms so much in demand, and intended for use as bedding plants in semi-shaded gardens. They are called 'Non-stops' and are readily available from retail nurseries in spring. Expect them to bloom in profusion from mid-summer onwards