

CHAPTER 11

CULTIVATION

Watering

Many well meaning growers will warn you not to over-water your begonias, and in fact to let the surface of the growing medium dry out between waterings. Good advice indeed when applied to potted indoor plants but what if they are in the garden or the pots are in the outdoors? Torrential rain is the norm in many places and begonias in the garden must be able to accept this degree of over-watering. The answer lies in well drained garden beds where heavy and prolonged rain will drain away quickly and not affect the plants.

Being succulent by nature, begonias are capable of storing moisture and nutrients and this is especially so in the case of the rhizomatous group. They do not require daily watering in most situations, but when you do water them make sure to soak the garden bed, or the pot, rather than just the surface couple of centimetres. Such watering will only be required at weekly or, in very hot weather twice weekly, intervals.

So when do you know if your begonias need watering? Use the finger test - a sensitive finger tip pushed below the surface of the growing medium will quickly tell if the area below the surface is dry, and this is when to water. Once you start to grow begonias you will find that leaf colour fades slightly when they are thirsty and with experience you will have no trouble in knowing when watering is due.

Pots and tubs located out-of-doors need particular attention in your watering program as once the foliage becomes so thick as to shed the rain then you must be careful indeed to ensure that water reaches the potting mix. This is particularly so in rainy weather when it is tempting to think that all the garden plants have been well and truly watered by nature. This may not be so in the case of all your precious outdoor potted plants.

Over-watering is a real possibility with potted plants grown as indoor decoration and the surface of the potting mix should be allowed to dry out between waterings - wait until your finger detects just the slightest moisture some 3 cms below the surface, then take the plant outside and soak it thoroughly. Allow it to drain till no more water comes away then return it to its indoor location, being very sure not to let it stand in a saucer of water! Some indoor plants, including begonias, will benefit from regular exposure to the fresh air of the out-of-doors and watering day is the ideal time to give them an airing. This particularly applies to plants kept in an air-conditioned environment for the indoor air will quickly be dried out and that