

CHAPTER 12

PESTS AND DISEASES.

Begonias are remarkably free from disease and especially so when grown as garden plants where the free circulation of air usually prevents attack by their worst enemy, mildew. Insect pests on the other hand are as much a problem with begonias as with other garden plants and you can expect visits from aphids, snails, slugs and other assorted garden nasties. Possums too, in Australia at least, seem to take a liking to some of the begonias and will nibble at many of them till they find the one they really like. Mites will occasionally attack begonias, especially those grown in glass or shade houses. Thrips may at times attack your begonias, their onset being recognised by a brown residue appearing on the lower parts of the leaf veins.

The very best way of dealing with these problems is to prevent them occurring and to this end it is essential that indoor grown begonias have a free flow of air around the growing benches. This will do much to keep powdery mildew and botrytis away.

Good growing practices are the key to prevention of disease and insect attack, for a healthy and vigorously growing plant is able to rapidly generate its natural defences against predators, be they insects or disease. Keep to your fertilising program, water as recommended and prune correctly.

Powdery Mildew

You may occasionally hear reference to 'the mildew season'. This is not a specific season such as spring or winter but may occur at any time when the conditions are right and certainly more than once each year. When humidity is high and the days are warm to hot followed by cooler evenings then mildew is most likely to strike your plants. The mildew spores are floating free in the air at all times but will only develop on leaf surfaces that are slightly damp, and the cooler evenings will cause the humidity to condense as a very thin layer of moisture, virtually undetectable, on susceptible leaf surfaces. Powdery mildew will germinate on this layer of moisture in about 14 hours so that you are greeted in the morning with a sprinkling of white spots on the affected leaves.

This mildew will, if not treated, eventually do great damage to the plant, in the worst case causing the leaves to drop and in some cases killing the plant, and at best making the plant look most unsightly. Only a few of the begonia family are prone to mildew attack and chief among these are the bedding