

CHAPTER 13

PROBLEM SOLVING

Plants are in many ways like people and one of these is reaction to stress. Wilting, leaf drop, burnt leaves, leggy growth or not growing at all are usually responses to some sort of stress and you, the grower, are in the best position to assess just what this is. Once the cause is known then remedial action is often a simple matter. A poor garden soil or potting mix can be a source of stress which is often overlooked, so if your begonias are not performing well consider in the first place whether you have provided a good growing medium for your plants. If you have done so then perhaps you may find the solution to your problem in the following:

Wilting

This is the most common reaction to stress and can be triggered by insufficient water, over-fertilising, excessive heat or cold, windy conditions, collar rot or the presence of nematodes or other pests.

Generally, wilting is a cry by the plant for water and is often preceded in begonias by a paling of foliage colour. Once you become well acquainted with your begonias you will become aware of this indicator. When you water ensure that the garden soil or potting mix is thoroughly soaked, and then wait until the soil or mix has a dry surface before watering again.

Over-fertilising is dealt with in Chapter 11 under the side heading 'Fertiliser Burn'.

On excessively hot days begonias may wilt to some degree, especially if they are subjected to direct sunlight. Watering is the obvious remedy and this, together with the arrival of a cooler evening, will generally fix the problem. It may be wise to consider relocating any affected plants to a less sunny position.

Nematodes do not cause immediate wilting but will slowly decrease the plant's growing vigour until wilting and subsequent death occur. This problem is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 12.

Leaf Drop

Leaf drop is another reaction by plants when subjected to undue stress. The onset of cold weather will often cause leaf drop. Cane-like are especially subject to this as are some of the shrub-like and rhizomatous begonias. Do not be overly concerned when this occurs as new leaves will quickly appear with the return of warmer weather. Some begonias are winter dormant and new growers are often concerned at leaf drop in these if they are not aware that it will inevitably occur. *B. crassicaulis* is one, as are all the