

tuberous begonias. Many rhizomatous begonias grown in cold climates will also become winter dormant and shed their leaves. This is particularly true of the Rex begonias.

### **Collar Rot**

Collar rot is a rotting of the stem at ground level and is rare in mature begonias which are grown in good conditions, but can be brought about if garden beds are over-enthusiastically dressed with mulch to such a state that wet plant material is heaped around the stems.

### **Damping off**

Do not confuse collar rot in mature plants with '*damping off*' of seedlings in which the tiny new plants suddenly collapse; this is most likely a fungal problem and can be prevented by the use of a suitable fungicide. The best prevention however is in the observance of strict hygiene when sowing seeds - sterilise the seed raising mix and keep the seed trays or pots covered with glass or plastic in the early stages of germination and growth.

### **Burnt Leaf Margins**

If the leaf margins of your begonias go brown, appearing to be burnt, and/or the leaf itself feels somewhat crisp, then the problem is most likely caused by lack of humidity over a period and is often the case with indoor grown begonias, especially where rooms are air conditioned or heated (both of which dry out the interior air). Begonias need humidity of ideally 60% but can survive on lower levels for quite a long time. However, when humidity drops to very low levels this problem is most likely to occur. Solution is to boost the humidity in the vicinity of the plant. Begonias grown indoors can be stood above (not in) water filled containers which may provide sufficient local humidity to remedy the problem. Similarly shade house or glass house humidity can be boosted by covering the floor with sawdust or similar material and keeping it damp. Growing ferns, especially maiden hairs, under the growing benches is another way to improve local humidity. In extremely dry conditions a misting system in the growing house can be of great benefit in raising humidity levels. I have mentioned evaporative coolers in Chapter 5 and these are most useful in hot weather not only to cool the growing house but also to boost the humidity.