

PART 4

PROPAGATION

CHAPTER 14

AN INTRODUCTION TO PROPAGATION

General

It is a wise gardener who propagates replacement plants as soon as possible from those newly acquired so that losses in the early stages of settling them into their new home can be readily replaced. Besides this, one of the greatest pleasures in life is to give a friend a precious plant that you have brought to life from seed or cutting. This Part deals with propagation of all types of begonias.

Begonias are regarded as succulent plants although some, such as the cane-like, have seemingly woody adult growth. This succulent nature makes for easy vegetative propagation (ie from cuttings) which ensures that the resulting plants, both species and cultivars, will be true to type; but there is one exception - leaf cuttings from *B.* 'Cathedral Window' will produce a miniature of the parent called *B.* 'Fiji Islands'! Species begonias propagate true to type from seed, whereas cultivars cannot be relied upon to do so.

As a general rule, rhizomatous begonias, including the rexes, propagate from either leaf cuttings or rhizome sections, tuberous begonias from basal and lateral shoots and leaf cuttings, whilst all the other begonias need to be propagated from tip or stem cuttings. There are exceptions to this where some shrub-like and cane-like begonias will propagate from leaf cuttings whilst the bedding begonias (*semperflorens*) do best from basal cuttings. Many of the shrub-like begonias and some others may also be propagated by simple layering.

Cuttings are best rooted in a suitable medium but some growers have success standing them in water until roots form. I prefer using a cutting medium as the roots which develop in water are very delicate and the cutting may die unless handled very carefully.

Cleanliness is essential when working with living plant material. Ensure, where possible, that all cutting medium is new and sterile. Sterility may be achieved to an acceptable degree by 'cooking' small quantities in a micro-wave oven or by pouring boiling water through it. All tools used should be newly