

determined what pollinators (apart from the occasional bee) are at work in the Botanic Garden begonia beds and I have found few opinions written as to what those pollinators may be, especially bearing in mind that we are growing these plants so far away from their natural homelands and it is doubtful if their natural pollinators have followed them. I am inclined to the belief that our begonias are pollinated by agitation of the male flowers by wind or bird or animal, which may account for species seed from our gardens usually being true to type. We also find that hand pollination in garden grown begonias is most often successful and true to type.

The seed is extremely fine and is best used when freshly gathered. It may be stored for later use by sealing in a suitable container (aluminium foil is recommended) and kept in the lower part of the kitchen refrigerator – not the freezer.

It should be sown into a sterile, open medium similar to your normal cutting or potting mixes. Fill a suitable container with mix, firm it down and water thoroughly, preferably by standing the container in water (rain water if available), and allowing the mix to soak it up. Allow to drain for at least one hour and preferably overnight. Scatter the seed evenly over the surface - you may find it convenient to hold the seed in a folded sheet of paper and gently tap it to allow the seed to escape slowly. Do not be tempted to plant a lot of seed in a small container – it will be extremely difficult to separate the plants at a later stage. Do not cover the seed with additional mix as it requires light in addition to moisture and heat in order to germinate. Cover the container with a sheet of glass or plastic sheeting and place in a warm light place but out of direct sunlight. Ideally the container should be placed on bottom heat of about 22-24°C but this is not necessary if the air temperature is at this or a higher mark. During the germination period - usually from 2 to 4 weeks but longer in some cases - the surface of the mix must be kept damp, not wet - it should not be allowed to dry out. Prevent this by regular inspections and then water if necessary from the bottom by standing the container in a water bath. However, if the seed bed has been correctly prepared and covered after the seed is sown it should contain sufficient moisture to keep it damp during the whole of the germination period.

Initial germination will reveal a faint green bloom on the surface of the mix. Growth in the initial stages is usually slow, but don't be discouraged, the tiny seedlings will develop in due course. The glass or plastic cover should be kept in place for the first two weeks after germination and then removed in stages so that the seedlings are gradually 'hardened off'.

To hasten the growth process fertilising may commence when the small plants are about 7 days old, at first applying water soluble fertiliser from a hand held mister commencing with small applications only. When the first two true leaves are evident the plantlets should be pricked out into a container of your