

of begonias with basic silver leaves patterned with green and they are all most attractive and well worth growing.

Rex begonias

As noted in chapter 6, the rexes are usually regarded as indoor plants, but by all means try them in your garden scheme in a brightly lit position which does not receive direct sunshine. Perhaps you will find them to be a most attractive planting for a rockery or similar situation, especially if grown amongst ferns. Do not be disappointed if they lose their leaves in cold winters – they will come again in the spring.

Thick stemmed begonias

B. egregia. Classed as thick-stemmed, this truly amazing species native to Brazil develops into a small tree which will grow well in gardens not subject to heavy frost. The large, 30 cms (12 ins) by 8 cms (3 ins), mid-green leaves are quite rough in texture and certainly make for an eye-catching feature plant which grows up to 2 metres or more with a pleasing, many stemmed habit. White flowers appear in winter and are borne in large clusters well into spring. Cold winters and hot summers do not adversely affect this spectacular begonia. Does best in filtered sunlight but will tolerate higher amounts and still look good. Needs a well drained open growing medium and a large tub if not garden grown. Fertilise regularly for best results. Old leaves yellow and eventually fall but remove these to keep the plant looking its best. New foliage grows quickly. Prune as required, removing old stems at ground level and cutting others back as appropriate. Propagate from tip cuttings taken after flowering. A perfect plant for that tropical garden and recommended as a feature garden plant in any frost free area.

B. ulmifolia. As the name suggests this Venezuelan species from the thick stemmed group has leaves shaped like those of the elm tree. A medium growing begonia which produces large numbers of white flowers from winter through spring. The light green foliage makes a delightful contrast amongst darker leafed plants. Likes plenty of light and tolerates several hours of sunshine each day. Tends to grow straggly but this can be controlled by routine tip pruning.