



Begonias: Made for the Shade

The family of begonias is a large and showy one. There are around 1300 species and numerous cultivars boasting highly ornamental flowers and/or foliage. They are some of the finest and most beautiful plants for shade. A few also tolerate some degree of sun. One important thing that all have in common is a strong need for well-drained soil and good air circulation.

Several types grow well in our area and are found readily at local garden centers.

Wax begonias are commonly seen planted outdoors in large masses and showy borders. They also grow well in containers and hanging baskets. Forming clumps six to eight inches high and wide, these little workhorses branch freely and flower continuously throughout the summer.

Harmony and Prelude begonias are compact, fibrous-rooted wax begonias with an upright habit, bearing either bronze or green foliage. The Harmony begonias have bronze foliage and produce flowers in a range of pinks, coral and white. There is also a pink and white bicolor. Harmony begonias tolerate heat and rain

well and will grow in full sun if the soil is moist and well-drained. Prelude begonias are similar to Harmony, but have green foliage and are best grown with mid-day shade.



The deep-colored foliage of the wax begonia combines beautifully with the variegated foliage of the geranium.

One of the most popular begonias for hanging baskets is a tuberous-rooted variety known as 'Nonstop.'® It has been the most-sold tuberous begonia since the mid-seventies. Planted in flower beds, borders or containers, this famous nonstop bloomer produces a myriad of rich flowers in stunning shades of yellow, orange, pink and white. The flowers are perfect for placing in a shallow glass bowl filled with water and a floating candle or two, creating a romantic centerpiece.

Nonstop begonias should be kept somewhat on the dry side. Water logging the soil will encourage root rot and mildew. Inexperienced gardeners often

misinterpret a wilted, yellowing plant as one needing more water when in fact it is suffering from too much water. Check for moisture by poking a finger down into the soil about an inch. If it feels wet, don't water yet.

The Rex begonia, with its wildly varied leaves, makes a wonderful addition to a shaded deck or patio garden. Rexes also produce attractive flowers but the flowers are overshadowed by the striking, many-colored, streaked, bordered, spotted, and/or splotched foliage. These varieties are best used in a container or basket in partial to full shade. They are also an attractive indoor plant if given the proper growing environment. Rex begonias like a humid environment and grow best under warm conditions. Day temperatures around 70°F and night temps of 60° at night are ideal. In cooler temperatures, growth will be slow or stop entirely.

Rex Maui Mist boasts silver-edged, dark pink foliage. Its great vigor, long leaf petioles and long pointed leaves create especially nice hanging baskets. It is also a good filler plant for mixed containers, combining nicely with other plants to fill in the middle ground.

Rex Fire Flush is a popular heirloom variety from the 1800's featuring olive green leaves edged in dark green, with an even darker center. Fire engine red hairs cover the entire plant, and fragrant, white to soft pink flowers are an added plus. It is an eye-catching stand-alone and also works well as the middle ground in a combination planting.



Dragon Wing begonias pictured with Brunnera 'Jack Frost'

Sinbad is a beautiful antique Angel Wing variety and does well with a little morning sun. Its attractive green foliage is overlaid with a silver sheen and pendulous pink flowers hide beneath. Stunning when mixed with ferns or impatiens, this Angel Wing adds height and drama to a mixed planting.

Dragon Wing™ Begonia offers a dramatically different look from standard begonias. It has a unique and beautiful arching, pendulous habit that shows off an abundance of red or pink flowers. This spectacular plant is a great stand-alone in average-sized containers or hanging baskets

Like its Dragon Wing counterpart, Baby Wing™ Begonia is extremely heat tolerant and handles stressful conditions well. Baby Wing is a finer textured plant with pink or white flowers and an upright, mounded growth habit. It makes a charming focal point and is a superb filler in the middle of a combination planting, in either landscapes or containers. Most begonia plants can be moved indoors to a sunny

window or sunroom before first frost and carried over to the next season. Angel Wing and Dragon Wing begonias need very bright light and do well in an east or west window. Keep slightly moist and fertilize very lightly through the winter months. These varieties don't go dormant, so do not allow the soil to dry out completely.

Nonstop begonias go dormant with the first frost. Dig up and store the tubers in a dry dark place over the winter. Replant indoors in early Spring and continue growing outdoors after danger of frost is past.

Rex begonias are an attractive indoor plant if grown in a bright and humid environment. Under less ideal conditions many cultivars will enter dormancy, dropping some or all of their leaves. If this happens, water only sparingly until spring, when new leaves should begin to emerge.