Growing Begonias Indoors

Begonias (Begonia species) belong to a huge family that includes over 1000 species worldwide. Except for the hardy begonia, which will survive winters in South Carolina, begonias don’t tolerate cold temperatures, and are grown either as annuals or dug up in the fall, stored and replanted in the spring. South Carolina gardeners interested in having begonias year round can grow many different potted-types indoors all year.

Flowering Houseplant Begonias
Flowering Pot Begonias: These begonias are used primarily to provide temporary floral color to the home. They flower during different times of the year, depending on the type.

Tuberous Begonias: These plants grow from tubers and range in form from those with short upright stems and large saucer-size flowers to the hanging basket types with multiple trailing stems covered with flowers. Most tuberous begonias have spectacular flowers in summer and autumn.

Tubers can be saved over winter and replanted in spring. At the end of the flowering season stop watering and cut off shoots. Lift tubers from the soil and store in dry peat moss in a cool, dry place. More information on storing and replanting tubers is available in HGIC 1159, Begonia.

Lorraine, Cheimantha or Christmas Begonias: These winter-flowering begonias are compact and evergreen, growing to about 1½ feet. Flowers are usually single but may be semi-double or double. Flowering occurs from late autumn to early spring. Stems are usually weak and require support. Pinch out the tips when the plant is young to promote bushier growth.

Elatior Begonias: The Elatior hybrids, which include the Reiger begonia, are similar to Lorraine begonias but they have larger flowers. Elatior begonias are available in flower all year round.

Lorraine and Elatior begonias are usually discarded after flowering but can be restarted by cutting them back to within 3 inches of the crown. Reduce water and keep in a cool location. Increase water in spring. New shoots can be used as cuttings.
The Elatior begonia (*Begonia x hiemalis*) flowers come in many colors including yellow, white, red, pink, and orange. Barbara H. Smith, ©2015 HGIC, Clemson Extension

**Evergreen Flowering Begonias:** These begonias may be less spectacular in flower than the flowering pot begonias, but they have the advantage of keeping their leaves year round. There are many different types, ranging from small (6-inch) bushy plants to tall (10-foot) cane-stemmed types. There are also trailing types that are used in hanging baskets.

**Bushy Type:** The most common bushy-type is the wax begonia, which is generally grown as an annual outdoors in the summer but can be dug up and potted in autumn and brought indoors for the winter. Others in this group include the elephant ear and fuchsia begonias, less common than wax begonias and somewhat more difficult to grow.

**Cane-stemmed Type:** When not pruned, cane-stemmed begonias may reach 10 feet in height. It is a good idea to cut back overly-long stems in the spring or early summer to encourage new growth at the base. The tall, bamboo-like stems may require staking. Cane begonias are among the easiest to grow. Showy hanging clusters of red, pink or white flowers open in spring and summer. Some cane-stemmed begonias flower all year long.

These begonias have handsome foliage as well as attractive flowers. Most leaf surfaces are glossy, but some have a dull surface. Leaf color ranges from pale to dark green to mahogany. Often the leaves are shaped like angel wings. One of the species, *B. coccinea*, is named "angel wing" begonia, although many varieties in this group are commonly called angel wing begonia.

Angel Wing begonias (*Begonia aconititolia x coccinea*) are one of the easiest types of begonias to grow. Barbara H. Smith, ©2015 HGIC, Clemson Extension

**Trailing-Type:** Shrimp begonia (*B. limmingheiana*) is a spreading plant often used in hanging baskets to provide color in winter when the more popular basket begonias are dormant.

**Culture:** Flowering houseplant begonias should be located in a bright spot and receive some direct sunlight. Early morning sun in an east window works well. Many of the cane and shrub-types flower best with some direct sun. Several hours of winter sun are beneficial.

Keep soil evenly moist, allowing it to dry only slightly between waterings. Reduce water in winter (stop watering tuberous begonias in fall). Always avoid wet or waterlogged soil. When plant is in full growth, fertilize with balanced liquid fertilizer at half strength at alternate waterings. Never allow plants to sit in a saucer of water.

Begonias tend to be leggy. Pinch the tip of branches to promote lateral growth. At desired fullness, stop pinching to allow the plant to flower (if it is not already flowering).

Begonias growing indoors should be moved to a partly sunny location outdoors during the summer. Some begonias do not tolerate direct sunlight and should be placed in the shade. More information on moving indoor plants is available in [HGIC 1454, Indoor Plants - Moving Plants Indoors & Outdoors](#).
Foliage Begonias

Many begonias are grown primarily for their decorative foliage, although some of these foliage types may also have nice flowers. Most foliage begonias grow from thick rhizomes that grow along or just beneath the soil surface. The growth habit is generally bushy or trailing, but there are a few tall foliage begonias.

Leaf size, shape and texture are varied. Size ranges from ½ inch to 1 foot. The many shapes (such as heart, star and oval) and textures (including waxy and smooth, dull and puckered, wavy margins) make foliage begonias interesting to grow. Foliage begonias flower in midwinter to late spring. Flowers may be hidden in the foliage, just above it or on long stems above the foliage.

Rex begonia hybrids may be the most striking of all foliage begonias. Bright and unusual shades of green, pink, red, silver, purple and gray combine to make bold patterns on the leaves.

Culture: Foliage begonias should be located in a bright spot away from direct sunlight. Keep soil evenly moist, allowing it to dry only slightly between waterings. Reduce water in winter. Always avoid wet or water-logged soil. During periods of growth, fertilize with balanced liquid fertilizer at half strength at alternate waterings. More information on fertilizing is available in HGIC 1450, Indoor Plants - Cleaning, Fertilizing, Containers & Light Requirements.

A humid environment is needed, but misting is not recommended. Instead, spray the surrounding air. Maintain temperature at 66 to 73 °F. Temperature at night should not drop below 55 °F. Repot in spring. Divide at repotting when plants are pot-bound (roots surrounding the root ball). More information on repotting is available in HGIC 1458, Indoor Plants – Transplanting & Repotting.

Problems

Diseases are an infrequent problem in the home environment. Common insect pests include mealy bugs, whiteflies and spider mites. More information on common houseplant is available in HGIC 2252, Common Houseplant Insects and Related Pests.

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