

BEGONIA X TUBERHYBRIDA



The tuberous begonias we know today have a most spectacular range of colour, form and size of flowers. While being frost tender, with reasonable care and thought they can provide a spectacular display through summer and autumn in our climate.

There are two main types worth growing: the tall, large, double-flowered type with flowers resembling a large camellia or rose, many with ruffled edges; and the multiflora non-stop type which has many smaller single, semi-double or double flowers for several months. Flowering can be prolonged by removing faded flowers regularly.

Tubers of named cultivars and unnamed seedlings of both types are available from specialist growers from winter to early spring or as potted plants in many local garden centres in late spring.



Tubers should be started in small pots or trays in a frost-free area in late September in a coarse free-draining mix and kept damp without waterlogging. Begonias develop roots all round the tuber so potting mix can just cover the tuber to encourage a good root system. Tubers are planted with the hollow side up. As growth increases to 8 cm high repot into 15 cm pots. Do not use a large a pot at this stage. Allow only one or two main stems to remain, excess stems may be carefully removed and grown on as cuttings in sharp sand and peat; these will form small tubers for next season. In early December increase pot size to 20–30 cm and place in growing position in an open area free from harsh sun and wind but where there will be air circulation to prevent mildew and other fungal problems.

Tuberous begonias will grow underneath trees, or hanging in trees, on the south or south–east side of the house, on patios or in a shade house where the only direct sun they receive is early morning sun. Glasshouses can be too hot in summer and likewise indoors where the sun shines directly through windows can be detrimental.

Smaller non-stop tuberous begonias can be planted into the garden as an attractive border plant in semi-shaded positions. Normally these do not require additional support, particularly if grown close together. Protect from snails and slugs.

Larger flowering plants will grow taller and require small stakes and ties to support them and stop them being blown over. On larger types remove the smaller side buds of each flower spike and leave the larger centre male bud for an increase in flower size. Face the leaves to the front at all times as this is where most flowers appear and face.

For best results use a good quality free-draining slightly acidic mix. Do not overwater at any time, as this will quickly rot the fine hair-like roots which grow from the tubers. Use a three-month slow release fertiliser high in potash at final potting stage and apply a soluble seaweed or fish emulsion fortnightly until April.

By mid-April reduce watering and return plants to a frost-free area to die down. Stems will fall off as growth stops and then tubers may be removed from the soil and placed in a tray with a little dry potting mix. Place the tray in a plastic bag and store in a frost-free area until next spring when the process can be repeated.

