

How to...

# Grow Begonias



Begonia tubers can be grown indoors or outdoors and are half hardy (*die in the frost*) unless they are taken out of the soil and kept overwinter.

## **Sprouting**

The best way to start off a Begonia tuber is to plant it inside in a seed tray or pot of slightly damp compost in February or March. This is done by burying them in the compost so the top side is just covered. Space them about 5cm apart.

The top of the tuber is concave and the root end is convex (if you cannot tell you may be able to see the new shoots sprouting or a scar is sometimes left from last years stem). The best temperature to keep the tubers in is between 18 – 21 degrees, anything cooler and they will struggle to form shoots very quickly.

## **Growing On**

Once the tubers have started to sprout and they have small leaves on them they are ready to pot on into a 13cm

pot using John Innes No.2 compost. A cane can be added at this stage to help support the plant (*because adding a cane later can damage the delicate stem and foliage*). Plants may need potting on again at a later stage if they become too big for the pot or if you are planting them out in the garden so you will have to be careful not to damage the stem and leaves at this stage.

## **Planting out**

When the plants are big enough to plant out they will need to be hardened off (get used to cooler temperatures). This is usually done at the end of May. To begin with the plants are put outside during the day in a sheltered position and brought back in at night for about a week. After that, if there is no sign of frost, the plants can be left out overnight as well for another week. Once this is done and there is no sign of frost, the plants can be planted out into their final positions usually by the end of May.

Begonias prefer to be planted in a moist, semi-shaded area out of the midday sun. Feeding is usually started once the first flower buds have formed and a liquid feed like Miracle Gro, Phostrogen or a small amount of liquid tomato feed can be given regularly, to give good leaf growth and lots of flowers.

## **Storing**

In about October, depending on the weather, the leaves will start to turn yellow. This is when you need to reduce the amount of water you give the plant and stop the feeding altogether to let the compost dry out. Once the pots are completely dry, tip them out and let the tubers dry out a little more before storing. If the tubers have been planted in the ground, you will need to dig them up carefully and let the foliage die off, remove all of the compost and put them inside to dry out.

Once the tubers are completely dry, they can be dusted with sulphur and stored in very dry sand over winter in a cool, frost free position.