



The Bayou Begonian

*Newsletter of the
Louisiana E-Branch of the American Begonia
Society*

July-September 2019

President's Message:

We just returned from a 10 day cruise ship visit to Scandinavia. Hoping to escape Baton Rouge summer temps, we enjoyed Norway in the 50s, but by the time we got to Denmark we should have brought shorts! A day trip to Berlin was actually a sweaty 90s and the way home on the un-air-conditioned train was memorable—a memory we hope not to retain. That must have been an EAST German train. Several hundred Viking crew members greeted us with champagne and high fives as we reboarded the ship—applauding our survival of the 12 hour day.

Seriously, it was a great experience except we did not get to make the helicopter tour available on a previous outing when 400 people were lifted off our ship the Viking Sky last March. They told us it was a one time deal!

The mountains, waterfalls, and fjords of Norway were breath-taking. We started in Bergen on the north shore and stopped in several towns on our way to Oslo. It is surprising to learn that these seaside towns are quite temperate because of the Gulf Stream—they get very little snow and infrequent freezing temperatures. We visited farms, current and iron age and the wild flowers were beautiful. Norway was previously a very poor country, until in 1969 oil was discovered in the North Sea and now it is both beautiful and prosperous.

After seeing Vigeland Sculpture Park (200 statues in the buff) and downtown Oslo, some friends joined me for a taxi trip the second day to Oslo's Botanic Garden—everything was flourishing in the longest days of the year—sundown at 11 pm!

Our one stop in Sweden took us to Gothenburg Botanical Garden; we were unfortunately too late to view their best collections—spring bulbs and rhododendrons, but the huge perennial borders were outstanding. There were a number of greenhouses, including a “begonia house” pretty much the worse for wear. Perhaps 40% of

the plants were actually begonias and those might give the genus a bad name viewed alone.

In Alborg, Denmark, we visited a Viking farm, fort and burial ground. The graves were preserved from the 900s because sandstorms from nearby coasts covered and preserved the stone markers which were only found recently. The archaeologists are keeping very busy in all of Scandinavia and are trying to improve the Vikings' reputation by revealing that they combed their hair and took weekly baths, unlike most of their English and French victims.

We toured the three city centers of Berlin and traced the last remnants of the wall. The city is surprisingly green and peaceful and we lunched on a river boat viewing new and old architecture. The linden trees lined the approach to the famous Brandenburg gate.

Our last day was in Copenhagen, pronounced with a long A, not AH. We went to the famous Tivoli Gardens and saw hanging baskets with *boliviensis* hybrids and of course Dragon Wings, which must be the most widely grown ornamental begonia in the world—it is everywhere! Of course there were lots of ornamentals to appreciate and lots of rides to watch. Observation was the watchword, no way were we actually getting on any of those!

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24 hours to get home but it was worth the trip. All my begonias survived while I was gone, but I will be moving some under the trees for the summer to keep them as cool as possible. It is getting too hot to report any of them as they simply will not make new roots when soil temps are so high. I hope most of them will make it through summer-moved a few indoors to join me in the air conditioning.

Keep cool!

Cindy Moran

ABS Convention

The 2019 ABS Convention is September 3-8 in Sacramento, California. There are great tours and speakers planned. You can all the information on the hotel and registration on the ABS website at www.begonias.org.

SWR 2020 Get-Together

It was expected that next year's Get-Together would be in Houston, but we've just learned they could not host it next year so Ft. Worth is stepping in and it will be there. They are currently looking for the hotel, but hope to find one near the Ft. Worth Botanic Garden. This will be a wonderful chance to visit the largest begonia collection in the U.S. If you have not visit Ft. Worth before, the Gardens are in the Cultural District where there are a number of museums. The Botanical Garden itself is very beautiful - there is a spectacular Japanese Garden and a very large observatory. When I visit there I like to have lunch in a small tea room in a giant antique mall that is amazing that is right on the edge of the Garden on I30.

It would be a great place to plan a vacation in conjunction with the Get-Together. No date is set yet, but it is expected to be in May. Make plans to go if at all possible!

Louisiana E-Branch Goes Digital

Some of you may not know yet that our club now has a presence on the internet. We now have two more places to share our love and knowledge of begonias. We took the newsletter name and used it for both a website and a Facebook page. Bayou Begonia kind of stands out and shows how unique we are.

The first is our website, <https://www.bayoubegonia.com/>. Here everyone can find all kinds of interesting information. There is a Begonia of the Month written by

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Freda where you can see and learn about varieties you may have never seen. Missed a copy of Bayou Begonia? There is a page where you can download back newsletters for the last year, along with articles of interest from various places. Know someone that might be interested in joining our club? Refer them to our contact page. Our types page contains loads of interesting and helpful videos.

Our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/418643798701927/> or search Bayou Begonia Society, is an interactive group where you can ask questions and share pictures of your begonias. Members post pictures of new plants found at nurseries or of plants from their own garden. It's a fun place to see what's new and what works for other people in our area. By sharing pictures to your Facebook you also help to let others know we are here and open us up to new members.

Get online and get involved. Isn't that why you joined a club?

My Ugly Duckling

Several years ago I attended an ABS Directors' meeting in Philadelphia—relishing the opportunity to see Longwood Garden, a spectacular showpiece public garden which is a must on any gardener's list. Also I went straight from the airport to visit the artistic Chanticleer Gardens before continuing on to the convention hotel.

At the conclusion of the meeting all of us were given a 4" pot of begonia *B. scharfii* donated by a member of the host begonia chapter. Since it was labeled by a Begonian there was no reason to suspect the species name might be wrong. A year later it was entered in the national show held in New Orleans and the judges declared it an unknown species at the classification table and it was entered as such.

As begonias go, this plant was rather unremarkable with dull green pointed leaves. Bright red hairy stems were its best feature and really it grew like a weed, had to be pruned to keep it shapely and from falling over with its own weight. But it was an unblemished, well shaped specimen and got a blue ribbon.

This year it was entered in the show at the Southwest Get-Together in Austin and this time the classification folk recognized it as a cultivar of the *scharffii* species, (also with a synonym *scharffiana*) named 'Waltanna.' It earned a blue, but was otherwise unheralded. I found it listed for sale by Taylor's Greenhouse in Pennsylvania.

Bringing it home this May I noticed a flower bud developing on one branch—*scharffii* I think is a winter bloomer so that was a surprise. Lo, the bloom when opened was a gorgeous long stem flower cluster, mostly male flowers but hiding tiny female flowers underneath the large male blooms. The backs of the unopened male flowers were stippled with tiny dark pink protuberances which gave the whole cluster a rosy

appearance—they opened to pure white with 4 or 5 petals and a host of yellow stamens.

Freda looked it up on the ABS website (why did I not think of that?) and it is indeed a registered ABS cultivar, a cross between *B. scharffii* and 'Viaudi'. It was registered in California, 1962, by Ruth Pease. This is a little surprising because as we in the South know, many California hybrids do not care for our climate. It has continued to set a few blooms this summer and it has survived several Louisiana summers past, so I hope to keep it in my collection and perhaps improve its flowering if possible.

Had it not flowered I might have let it go by the wayside, but now I hope to keep my 'Ugly Duckling' as a perennial favorite.



B. 'Waltanna' to the left.



*To the right, beautiful blooms of
B. 'Waltanna'.*

Before There was Summer There Was Winter

We had some very cold, wet weather here in North Central LA last winter, some nights in the 20's. And as I've mentioned before I ran late with everything last year including getting all my plants into the greenhouse before that cold came. As a result I had many pots of dead plants sitting around outside when spring came. But an amazing number have reemerged now that we've had a wet, very warm spring. Yesterday, I was trimming and repotting survivor, Brad Thompson's hybrid B. 'Jeanne Jones'. This is what it looked like earlier.. The second photo is the finished and repotted plant.



Other plants I found returning were two large pots of my B. 'Pagoda', several other canes, and one leaf re-emerged on a Rex Cultivar, my B. 'Pilgrim'. Some late returners, I have not yet identified. Even more exciting to me was that I found a basket full of tiny *B. grandis* ssp. *evansiana* that I have no idea where they came from. These had to be from a mature plant that dropped bubils or seed, but I don't recall having one last year!

Freda Holley

Behold your Grandchildren

Bland Currie reported on her results from the propagation project at our meeting in March with words and a couple of photos:

As a matter of curiosity I tried the curl thing when one of my lovely leaves fell off. It worked. Einstein could not have been more thrilled when he discovered relativity.



A Silver Lining on Black Clouds
by Mark Mese

In late April we had a strong storm hit Baton Rouge and it split the 10 year old plus plastic covering my 3000 sq.ft. greenhouse. I decided to grow the plants in the greenhouse under shade and replace the plastic this fall. I have a friend who grows a couple of 1000 bromeliads in my greenhouse (he takes care of all our plants during the week while I practice law). The begonias are growing under tables with bromeliads on the wire tables. The combination of good rain water and perfect shade has produced the best summer begonias I have ever had. I am debating whether to try and remove the plastic every year.

More photos on next page.



Begonias for Louisiana

Michael Higson earlier reported that his B. ‘Island Magic’ has sprouted new leaves and his canes are growing again. He also suggested that what we really need for new members are more LA hardy begonias. I [Freda] would note that one of the key goals of our group is to identify such begonias. Our Begonia of the Month feature on the new website Ron Broussard has developed for us will concentrate on begonias that have done exceptionally well for me in our climate. This features concentrates right now on species that are best for us. I add also that all my new

hybrids are being especially developed to thrive in our heat and humidity. I am primarily using species, new and old in their development since we know that usually crosses of species give a special hybrid vigor to go with the natural tolerance they may have. I will try to have more starts of both these species and my hybrids for our meetings. Cindy also knows from long experience which plants do well in LA and always provides such plants at our meetings. (The masthead photo on page 1 is *Begonia ludwigii*, very hardy here and parent of my B. ‘Goliath’ and ‘David’, both very hardy here as well.)



*Mark Mese's new conditions
can't be argued with when he
produces plants like these!*

***What's in a Name:
Maybe nothing, maybe everything.
by Ron Broussard***

As a rule I don't worry if a new begonia I find has a name tag in it or not. If it's something I can identify as a begonia and I don't have it already, it's coming home with me. I don't picture that changing anytime soon, but knowing exactly which plant you have can provide you with information that may help with the question, 'which plants grow best for me'.

This spring I got into a new line of Rex at my favorite nursery. The Dibbs line of Rex. I got four, B. 'Dibbs Rothko', 'Dibbs Butterscotch', 'Dibbs Moonlight', and 'Dibbs Cherry-Mint'. Now these all come from the same supplier, but as I have found out, these are four totally different begonias.

The first is a 'Dibbs Rothko'. This was a beautiful dark red leaf with a black rim around the edge. To my shock, as it pushed out new leaves, they are now white with a green border. In the picture you can still see the original red leaves under the new green ones. It is growing well and looks beautiful, but just a totally different plant than what I purchased. Why? I have no idea



Above is 'Dibb Rothko' at purchase; right is 'Dibb Rothko' now.



Second is the 'Dibbs Moonlight'. It had pale green leaves with dark green veins. I say had due to the fact of all of my Rexes this became the favorite meal of some local pest, either a caterpillar or a grasshopper would be my guess. Why this one Rex was devastated and none of the plants around it were touched is a mystery to me. It did not kill the plant, but it's going to have to wait for next year to try to show off again.



Next is the 'Dibbs Butterscotch'. It has pale green leaves with a touch of dark green on the edges with red veins. This one, so far, has had no issues. The color stays true and has had no pest problems. It has doubled in size nicely and of the three gets my vote for the easiest to grow.

Last is my personal favorite, 'Dibbs Cherry-Mint'. Pale green leaves with dark green veins and a red center. I came close to losing this one right after transplanting and it does not grow as fast as the other Dibbs, but the color contrast makes it worth the effort.

A couple of sidenotes. First, this year I changed soil and started testing a new potting soil from LSU called Tiger Greaux. This has now become my favorite soil. Drains perfect-ly and everything I have transplanted in it is doing great. Second, some of the small holes you see in the leaves came from tree branches that fell in the Rex bed during a recent storm.



Above left is B. 'Dibbs Moonlight', above right is 'Dibbs Butterscotch' and below left is 'Dibbs Cherry-Mint'.

