



The Bayou Begonian

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

January-March 2019

President's Message

We've been keeping fingers crossed the last few weeks hoping for mild weather and no hard freezes since our greenhouse heater is not working, the fan motor dead. Repeated requests to our service company have ended lost on someone's desk who failed to order the part, but FINALLY we expect motor and serviceman to arrive tomorrow. Since the house is pretty large, 14' by 50', it does not lose heat too fast at night, so even temps in the 30s are sustainable for existing plants. However powdery mildew is a threat when nights are too cold. Also I cannot propagate until it can be kept warm. Many canes are waiting to be cut back for winter and their cuttings used to make new plants.

Of course, I am keeping in mind our spring meeting and plant sale scheduled for March 23 at the Hammond Research Station and I hope everyone is looking forward to it and creating begonias to exchange. We will meet some of our new members who signed up last year at convention and this will be their first E-Branch meeting. That should mean even more variety at the sale and more begonia knowledge available to all. Please email me if there are certain topics that you would like to have explored or if you would like to talk about your experiences with your plants or bring some to show.

Although I am retired from the nursery business I still receive several grower and horticulture industry publications and Benary, who has always been the leader in begonia breeding, has been running some remarkable ads, so I am featuring one of them in this newsletter [see page 2]. I have grown begonia BIG and a similar cultivar WHOPPER for many years and they are wonderful landscape plants. In a full or half day sun exposure, as you can see from this photos, they grow up to 2 feet tall and are a solid mass of flowers on a 2 inch peduncle. Of course, Benary does not tell us the parentage but there must be shrub and semperflorens genes in there, maybe

some thick stem. These plants come from seed and are grown on from plugs into at least 4 inch containers for bedding out. Do not expect to find them in inexpensive packs, but one 4 inch pot will grow in ground to fill an 18 inch square or produce a 10 inch pot.

We'll be sending reminders but mark your calendar now--March 23, 2019 in Hammond.

Cindy Moran

*See next page

Growing from Seed

I am always encouraging growing from seed because not only do we get fresh new plants that way, we learn so much. Sometimes that even comes from simply setting seed on our plants in the first place. The photo above is of a seed pod with 6 wings on my hybrid Rex B. 'Pilgrim.' Normally, it produces a seed pod with four wings as do many begonias and it usually has one long wing as do most Rexes. I found this unusual pod along with a sister pod on one peduncle on my begonia. These two pods as you see have more than the normal number of wings which indicates they will also have more than the normal 4 cells within the pod. All other seed pods

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**I'M
KIND OF
A BIG
DEAL.**



Begonia BIG® in Washington D.C.

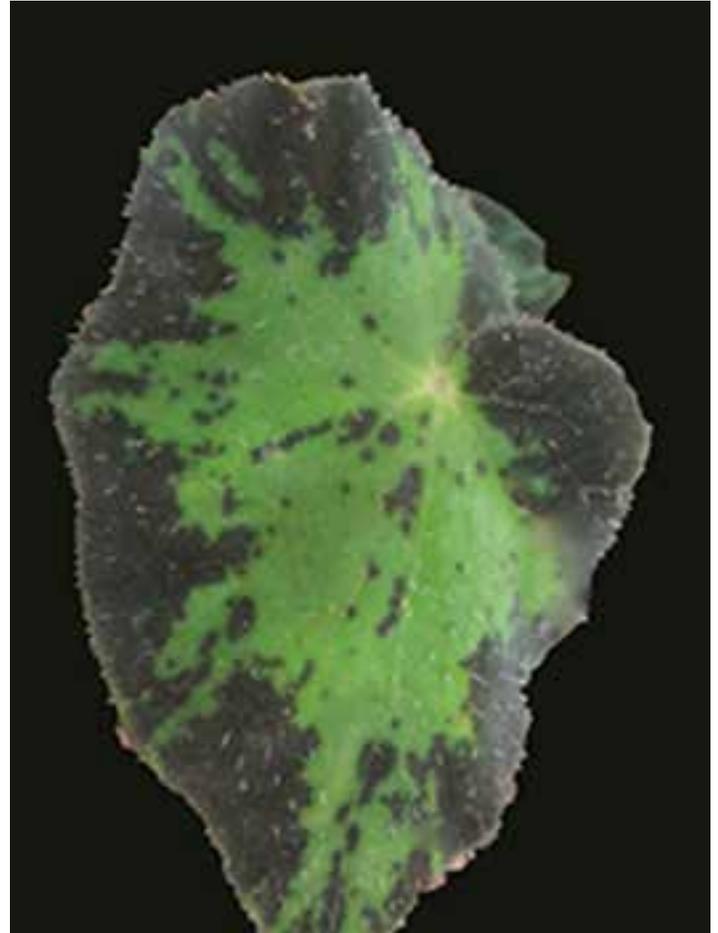
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Page from Benary Catalogue illustrating B. 'Big'.

on several other peduncles have the normal seed pods of a Rex begonia. This means that there has been a mutation somewhere in the formation of this seed pod. The pod itself is reminiscent of a pod that grows naturally on another begonia, U496. Naturally, I am watching the pods hoping that they will reach maturity so that I can plant their seed and see what develops.

Begonias appear to be more prone to mutation than many other plants. Sometimes this happens on leaf cuttings. At other times they develop on the plant itself. These are called sports. For example, B. 'Madame O'Reilly' mutates often. I have even gotten two totally different appearing plants from leaf mutations. Other have named sports of this plant.



Above, Begonia 'Madame O'Reilly' and at right a leaf on one sport plant. This is a begonia hybridized by the late Brad Thompson, one of our most prolific hybridizers.

Louisiana E-Branch Annual Meeting: Saturday, March 23, 2019

I hope you have our meeting in Hammond on your calendar and are looking forward to it. With all the new plants available last year in New Orleans, none of us could have acquired every one we wanted, but we may have a second chance at our meeting as many of us bring starts of our new plants to share.

Cindy always puts together an interesting day of learning opportunities as well. Still, the best part of any begonia meeting is just talking to other members about our experiences with our plants.

Cindy will be sending a notice of the beginning time, schedule, and lunch plans well before the meeting.

We especially want to welcome all our new members at the meeting since this will be our one time this year to get together unless some also attend the Southwest Region Get-Together that will be in Austin on May 1-5, 2019. I have been participating in the planning for that meeting and I promise you that is going to be a good meeting as well. All the details of that meeting are being posted on the ABS www.begonias.org website.

Freda Holley

Setting up a Large Terrarium *by Colleen Fiegel*

In August of 2016 I decided to try setting up a terrarium for some of my begonias. A few I knew needed high humidity, a few were starter plants and others I grew from seed. This was a first for me. I set up the first one in an old 10 gal aquarium I had with 2 pieces of glass on top. The second one I acquired from the trash and is also covered with glass. They are under regular fluorescent light for 12 hours.



- lower layer is extra coarse perlite
- tiny layer of charcoal
- upper layer is 2/3 Promix (soilless, peat based) and 1/3 extra coarse perlite ; wet with boiling water and then allowed to cool
- small cheap temp and humidity gauge

Luckily I must have done something right. These are pics taken with the glass removed after 28 months.





Front view of entire setup of the 2 terrariums and light above them.



To the left is my hybrid *B.* 'Merlot' grown and photographed by Michael Higson. Above is Mark Mese's photo of his *B. variegata*, a species from Thailand that was once considered a variety of *B. masoniana* before being designated as a species of its own. Mark thinks the small leaf may turn out to be a sport of this plant - note the different appearing pattern.

RUMINATIONS....

by Michael Higson

The end of another year is a good point to look back, and in my case of 25 to 27 years of growing Begonias. That its been that long is a bit of a shock. Until now it had never occurred to count the years.

In linear terms this has not been an uninterrupted stretch. To take one rather traumatic break; just as hurricane Katrina was about to slam into New Orleans I ditched everything I was then growing. It had been up to that point - late August - a particularly dry and consequently hot year. I don't remember what I was growing and had no notes or photos, this process beginning only in '06. Why so tardy is a mystery because through issues of the *Begonian* I began getting in 01 I was introduced to the world of begonia growing. Up to that point I was clue-less. I learned in some sort of fashion to identify the genus, usually Rex's and canes. I am fairly certain, for example, I had Pink Jade, and Caravan and a very few purchased from the big box stores, but these had to fight for survival in a back yard that doubled as a basketball court.

To the best of my recollection I met no one in New Orleans with begonias in their yard or greenhouse in the 12 to 14 years leading up to the 04 national convention in San Diego that I attended as a novice supreme.

If that dearth of contact illustrates anything, its the crucial importance of a branch or, at the very least, a web of contacts. But, that's not all. Something should be said about the location, the growing location during the past years. Its the formerly ball-pounded back yard, an area of something like 35' by 15' and overhung by a very large Sweetgum. It faces more or less due north, an advantage in the summer, but treacherous in sub-forties weather. Its is then that plants, all 70 pots or so, have to be moved indoors. This subjection of plants to sometimes many days on end of nasty weather, is no way to produce plants of show quality. One needs a greenhouse, or some kind of conservatory.

This coming year we are moving and to a place with even less outside growing space. Or so it seems. The challenges will continue....as they should.

Michael grew and photographed this beautiful B. 'Island Magic' to the left. This begonia is a hybrid by Greg Sytch of Florida. Begonias developed in Florida usually do much better in Louisiana's climate than those from California or states to the north. It is unusual to find a begonia with a spiral leaf that is as heat hardy as this one. Another such spiral leaf is on my own hybrid B. 'Pilgrim' whose seed pod was shown on page 1; and here below Mark Mese shares a photo of this plant he has grown. It is also quite heat hardy.

