

# Growing Begonias

**Shade-loving, big-blossomed tuberous begonias have a reputation for being difficult to grow. True, begonias are particular about how they're treated, but it does not take much to keep them happy. Growing begonias becomes easy when you know what they like. For a shady spot, begonias offer something irresistible – big color in dim light from flamboyant flowers that bloom non-stop mid-summer till frost.**

## BASICS

Begonia tubers are available at **GARDENWORKS™** in early February. Potted begonias arrive in late spring and early summer when we also will carry a selection of begonia baskets.

Remember: don't plant begonias out in the garden until all danger of frost has passed.

Begonias generally take from 12 to 15 weeks to bloom and will then bloom until the season ends.

For earlier bloom, start tubers indoors in pots in late winter/early spring (about six weeks prior to the last usual frost date in your area).

Begonias love soil that drains well and a warm, shaded location out of the wind. They don't like full sunlight. Where conditions are not ideal, adapt growing conditions slightly if you can. For instance, where too hot or wet, simply grow begonias in full shade or containers. Containers make it easier to control soil conditions and can be positioned to minimize exposure to sun, heat and wind.

## STARTING INDOORS FOR EARLIER BLOOMS

Select begonia tubers that are firm to the touch. When possible, start begonia tubers indoors about six weeks before the local planting date, when the threat of night frosts is past. Choose clean containers (at least 2-3 inches [5-7cm] deep) with a drainage hole. Use a commercial potting soil mixed with peat moss and sand, so soil stays moist but not soggy. Place tubers in the soil mix with their convex (rounded out) side pressed gently onto the surface of the soil. Cover with about half an inch of soil. A warm humid setting is optimal for promoting growth. Keep soil moist, but not wet. Never let the soil dry out completely.

When shoots reach six- to eight-inches (15-20 cm) tall, transplant to the garden or outdoor containers. (By this time the threat of frost should be past.)

## PLANT OUTDOORS AFTER FROSTS HAVE PASSED

Plant tuberous begonias in well-drained, moisture-retentive soil with a high humus content. Space plants one per square foot. Keep in mind; begonias do not like hot sun. Keep away from direct sunlight, midday heat and out of the wind. In cooler climates, direct morning and late afternoon sun are okay, but avoid windy areas. Wind can dry out the plants. Hanging baskets are especially susceptible to being dried out in a windy location. Most upright-flowering plants will need staking. Depending on the size of the plant, an 8-inch pot is plenty big for one plant. Three begonias fit nicely into a 15-inch pot.

Keep soil moist, but don't over water. Water the soil only and not the plant. Optional: a light application of houseplant fertilizer is helpful, for optimal performance, about once a month. For sturdier plants, pinch off extra or too long stems when the plants are developing. Keep the strongest three stems and nip off any others. For fewer but bigger flowers, pinch off early developing flowers, until the plant reaches 10 inches (25 cm.) In fall when night frosts hit, begonia season is over. Either bid begonias adieu as annuals or, prior to a killing frost, lift the tubers for over-winter storage. To store: after letting the tubers dry off for several days, layer them in peat in a cool dry place 7-10°C. In spring, replant plump, healthy tubers for another season of bloom.



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