

ARNOLDIA REVIEWS

The Thompson Begonia Guide, second edition. Mildred L. and Edward J. Thompson. P.O. Drawer PP, Southampton, N.Y.: Edward J. Thompson. Three volumes, illustrated. Vol. I, \$18.50, plus \$1.25 (shipping costs); Vol. II, \$17.50, plus \$1.25; Vol. III, \$23.25, plus \$1.50. Revision sheets, \$1.25.*

Until now, anyone interested in learning about begonia culture has found it almost impossible to locate much information that is pertinent and available. Most of the books devoted to growing begonias are out of print and dated. One cannot even buy an inexpensive beginner's pamphlet such as those available for orchid and gesneriad growers. In 1975, the American Begonia Society published a translation of Chevalier's *Begonias*. Written in 1938, this work offers much information of historical and taxonomic interest but obviously lacks the information on soils, fertilizers and light that has been learned in the intervening thirty-nine years.

Even if there were not this appalling lack of information on begonia culture, *The Thompson Begonia Guide* would still have to be considered a major contribution to horticultural literature. It is a comprehensive work that satisfies all levels of amateur growing. The beginner simply wants to know how to keep the plants alive and healthy, whereas the more sophisticated grower is interested in producing plants for show. The very advanced begonia enthusiast often wants to hybridize or venture into taxonomy. *The Thompson Begonia Guide*, happily, is a reference book to grow with, for the information in the three-volume set is for all levels of expertise, and the loose-leaf format allows revision sheets to be inserted as they become available.

The guide is organized around the concept that begonias with similar characteristics and growth habits have similar cultural requirements. On this basis, 1800 species and cultivars have been classified into horticultural groups and alphabetized in the guide. The information on potting soils, light, humidity, watering and care is clear and practical. A good mixture of photographs and drawings clearly shows the "how to" of every aspect of growing from potting to propagation.

* Because of its significance to both horticulturists and botanists, **The Thompson Begonia Guide** is being reviewed by a representative of each group. Corliss Engle, a Friend of the Arnold Arboretum, is an experienced amateur grower and past President of the Buxton Branch of the American Begonia Society. Bernice G. Schubert, a member of the staff of the Arnold Arboretum, is Curator and Senior Lecturer on Biology, with a special interest in Begoniaceae. Ed.

Because success in growing is an art, at best, based on experience, locale and style, the Thompsons have included articles by begonia growers from various sections of this country and around the world. Each article offers tips applicable to each region; common truths weave their threads in combination with the specifics. In addition, there are excellent articles on special growing areas, such as window-sills, artificial lights, etc., written by experts.

The more advanced growers will find a wealth of information, again with excellent graphics, on growing begonias for exhibition. The sections on terrariums, growing begonias on rocks or driftwood, and hangers are especially good.

The sophisticated amateur grower will find the sections dealing with bloom information, parentages of hybrids, and the extensive references to sources of information written about each begonia (not otherwise available) helpful and well organized. The reproduction of old begonia prints and the historical section will fascinate any amateur grower.

Millie and Ed Thompson have long been known as growers of spectacular begonia specimens. With this guide, all begonia fanciers will at long last reap the benefits of their knowledge and experience.

CORLISS K. ENGLE

The Thompson Begonia Guide is a very impressive, though unorthodox, document assembled with good taste and complete dedication by the Thompsons, who consider themselves hobbyist-growers and who have other unrelated, full-time careers. Its chief interest, for botanists, is the clearly presented information concerning those members of the Begoniaceae that are in cultivation. This material is not so easily available in as great detail anywhere else to my knowledge.

Volume I includes an alphabetical listing (A) of all species, hybrids, and cultivars known to be in cultivation; a horticultural Classification Listing (CS) in which the taxa are classified by the habit of the plants (cane-like, shrub-like, tuberous, rhizomatous, semperflorens characteristics, rex cultorum, etc.), an artificial but useful grouping since begonias with similar habit have, in general, similar cultural requirements. Also included is a Parentages of Hybrids (P) section, containing information not often compiled with such completeness.

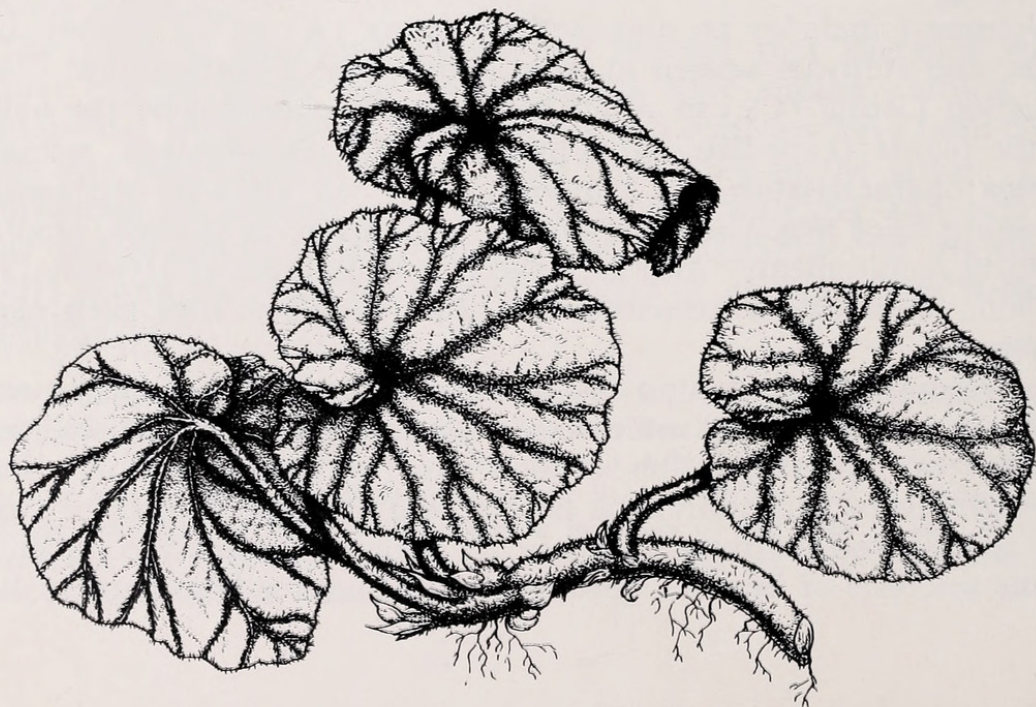
In Volume II a section on Bloom Information (B) lists species and cultivars separately and indicates flower color, flowering period, and amount of flowering. This section also includes some excellent photographs of both individual flowers and of inflorescences of various species and cultivars. Volume III is devoted almost completely to the interests of Begonia growers, but includes a fine Pictorial Re-

view (R) with 72 pages of photographs of species and cultivars. The volume is concluded with an enlarged and completely revised Bibliography (Bi), superceding the one in Volume I.

The symbols in parentheses following the section names appear on each page of the appropriate section, followed by the page number. That is, each section (seven in Volume I, five in Volume II, and four in Volume III, plus introductory matter for each volume) is separately paged making for extreme awkwardness in citation, and the impossibility of a general index. I think that if the symbols followed the page number and the pagination were continuous, much of this awkwardness would disappear.

The order in which the various taxa are considered in the Classification Listing section (C) follows that spelled out and illustrated in the section on the Classification System (CS). Much more information is included here for each taxon listed. However, there are various new symbols and abbreviations in such profusion that checking each one makes the task of acquiring the complete information complicated and time-consuming. The method of citing references by symbols does not follow any earlier formulated system I know of, either botanical or bibliographic, so mastering the "mechanics" of the section must be undertaken. The system seems a bit wasteful, also, in that the bibliography is listed at the beginning of the section (with the symbols) and again at the end of the volume in its own section (Bi). In addition, a revised bibliography occurs at the end of the volume (where most pages are dated April, 1977). A bibliography at the end with each entry numbered would obviate the need for the earlier list and all the symbols. The references could then be referred to simply by number.

The Classification Listing section (C) is 146 pages long and is of much interest to botanists because it presents the horticultural classification of each of various species of Begoniaceae considered in the



Guide and also lists the hybrids in each of the categories. This is very useful information obtained through long searching and much interchange with growers. It is a real contribution.

The Parentages of Hybrids section (P) is another extremely useful portion of the Thompson guide and surely must have been one of the most difficult to compile. Through the efforts of the Thompsons and other contributors to the *Begonian*, most growers of begonias have now become aware of the necessity of keeping records of the hybrids they produce. Until very recently, however, this has not been the case, making it difficult for botanists to identify these plants correctly or to duplicate the crosses.

The section called Glossary of Descriptive Botanical Terms (G) comprises a list of definitions compiled from various sources, "formulated for the grower and geared to his needs." The effort to modify definitions for the grower has, unfortunately, led to oversimplification and inaccuracies. A few examples will suffice to indicate the kind of trap into which one may fall. In the list below, the line following the term is the definition as given in the Guide. The line directly below, starting with a capital letter, is a correction and/or explanation.

androecium	reproductive portion of male flower composed of one or more stamens The androecium is also the "male" element of a perfect (bisexual) flower.
dichotomous	divided in two parts Dichotomous, in botany, implies <i>forking</i> into more or less equal parts.
dioecious	unisexual Unisexual with staminate and pistillate flowers on different plants.
gynoecium	reproductive portion of a female flower The gynoecium may be the "female" portion of a perfect (bisexual) flower also.
indigen	naturalized plant An indigenous plant, i.e., a native.
isotype	form common to the holotype An isotype is any duplicate (part of a single gathering made by a collector at one time) of the holotype; it is always a specimen. [International Code of Botanical Nomenclature — Article 7.]
perianth	floral envelope The two floral envelopes considered together; a collective term for the calyx and corolla.
stamen	the pollen bearing organs of a male flower

The stamens are the pollen bearing organs of any flower in which they occur, e.g., perfect (bisexual) flowers.

A term important in botanical descriptions of Begonias, which does not occur in the original or revised list (5/15/76), is *tepal*, used for a segment or unit of a perianth that is not clearly differentiated into calyx and corolla (i.e., sepals and petals), the usual case in Begonia flowers. Tepal has been insterted in the Addenda (G-15), dated 10/1/76, and is defined as "petal," an unsatisfactory equivalent.

The sections of the Guide in Volume II which I have not discussed in any detail include Historical Excerpts (H), Cultural Listings (L), and Propagation (PR). Those in Volume III include Culture of Begonia (CB), a section of 277 pages, profusely illustrated; Pictorial Review (R), an excellent set of photographs arranged by the horticultural classification groups; the Appendixes A and B (Ap); and the revised and enlarged Bibliography (Bi).

The section of Historical Excerpts is replete with interesting information from various periods in the collection and study of Begoniaceae and of botanical research on them. Translations of the excerpts not in English are an additional bonus. The horticultural reproductions in this series will also be of much interest to those not having access to such literature. The efforts of the Thompsons in amassing such a fine collection of reproductions is an indication of their deep interest and thorough devotion to the study of Begoniaceae.

The Cultural listings (L) are arranged so that Begonias may be chosen according to the light, space, and equipment they require. Subdivisions indicate which plants are best for beginners and/or more experienced enthusiasts.

The Propagation section (PR) covers in a clear, detailed, and well illustrated manner what seems to be complete information on stem cuttings, leaf cuttings, and propagation by seeds. It sounds as if anyone with a will to try these procedures could accomplish his objectives.

Volume III, which is concerned almost entirely with Culture of Begonias (CB) and the Pictorial Review (R), needs little comment from someone as inexperienced in growing these plants as I. However, the possibilities are numerous, challenging, and interesting and should draw many more adherents into the rapidly growing group of Begonia enthusiasts.

These three volumes of *The Thompson Begonia Guide* are large (29.5 × 10.5 cm.), hard cover books reproduced by a good quality photo-offset process. For the future I should like to think that the bulk of the volumes might be somewhat reduced and a single-volume "real" book be prepared which would have all the basic information and be somewhat easier to handle. In the meantime many people should derive great pleasure and satisfaction from enjoying Begonias with the Thompsons.

BERNICE G. SCHUBERT



1977. "Arnoldia Reviews." *Arnoldia* 37(4), 212–216.

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