

Rhizomatous Roundup

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Rhizomatous Begonias

- have rhizomes which store food and water
- usually bloom once a year in the winter or early spring
- are sensitive to over watering or over potting
- the rhizomes may grow horizontally or upright many varieties are grown primarily for their beautiful foliage
- some varieties require terrarium culture

Propagation techniques

1. Leaf Cuttings

- may be rooted in a soil-less mix (in a 3 or 4-inch pot) or (less commonly) in water
- shorten the stem to 2-4 inches
- push the stem or petiole into the soil
- if stem is started in water, transplant to a pot when small plantlet forms
- plants which require terrarium culture may be started directly in the terrarium

2. Leaf wedges

- include a leaf vein in each wedge
- wedges close to the stem will root more readily
- use a propagation box (clear shoe box with a clear lid)
- spread approx. 1/2"-1" of seed starting mix or perlite in the bottom of the box
- mist soil and cuttings with distilled water
- keep soil moist - not soggy
- there should be some condensation on the sides or top of the box
- check your starts every few days and mist with distilled water as needed
- when small plants (at least 2-3 leaves) form, the wedges may be transplanted into small containers (3 oz. cups with drain holes) and returned to a clean propagation box
- when plants begin to outgrow the box, acclimate the small plants to a less humid environment by removing the lid gradually over 2-3 days
- wedges may also be started directly in small containers (3 oz. plastic cups) in the box—be sure to make drainage holes in the bottom of your cups

3. Confetti method

- Soak leaf in a 10% bleach solution overnight
- use a plastic petri dish
- cut two layers of white paper towels to cover the bottom of the petri dish
- place small pieces of the leaf in the dish and spray with distilled water to moisten the paper toweling
- once pieces sprout 2-3 leaves, they may be transplanted as outlined above this method is more commonly used with Rex or thin-leaved varieties

4. Rhizome method

- Cut the growing end of the rhizome and place on top of the soil in a 3 or 4-inch pot to root
- some growers hold rhizomes in place with toothpicks—DO NOT pierce the rhizome

General Propagation Tips

- start with fresh, healthy plant material
- propagation of mature leaves is generally more successful
- if a leaf is limp, submerge it overnight in cold water to rehydrate prior to propagation
- always use fresh potting mix or perlite and clean pots or containers -your cuttings will be less likely to mildew or rot
- cutting material is best transported in zip-lock baggies—partially close the baggie, then blow it up like a balloon prior to sealing. This serves a dual purpose of protecting the leaf and introducing a small amount of moisture (from your breath) water only as much as necessary to keep the medium around the cutting damp
- to place drainage holes in your small plastic cups, clip wedges from the bottom rim of the cup with scissors, or poke holes from the inside-out with an ice pick. Making your holes from the outside-in may allow enough water to pool in the bottom of the cup to rot your new plant
- remember not to pot plants up more than one pot size at the time— this is especially important with rhizomatous begonias
- label all plants with the name of the hybrid or species
- you may wish to note the date you started your cuttings on the label
- If you find yourself with more plants than you need, share the extras with your begonia-growing friends or bring plants for the sale table. Half the fun of propagation is sharing the results!

Happy growing! There is a sense of accomplishment in growing a mature plant from a tiny cutting.

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