

Academy Garden Club Thymes

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY GARDEN CLUB OF LENOX

FEBRUARY 2024

Dear Academy Garden Club of Lenox
Members,

I hope to see many of you at our next meeting:

Date: Tuesday, February 13

Place: Lenox Community Center

Time: 6:00 pm

Flower Arranging Workshop

on

Valentine's Day

presented by

Bobbianne Salinetti & Jane Whalen



In the workshop, you will make an arrangement to take home. Please bring with you:

1. Your own flowers
2. A vase or container for your arrangement
3. Any mechanics you will want to use, such as floral tape, vase inserts or flower frogs, clippers.

In addition to our program and Valentine's refreshments, we will have a short business meeting where we will have an update of year-to-date financial results compared to budget and a consent agenda to approve minutes of the December meeting and accept the financial report.

Stay warm,
Susan

Horticultural Column Begonias By Harriet Wetstone

I must confess, I am startled to find that February is upon us. It is almost time to start daydreaming over seed catalogues, but we are still in the time of year when our houseplants are the most precious. This month I want to talk about my very favorite ones (well, probably my favorite is the plant I am fondling at the moment) which at least for today are **BEGONIAS!**



One of the many reasons to love begonias is that they present an incredible amount of variety, for both indoor and outdoor plants. *Outdoors?* The little waxy begonias that are an alternative to impatiens for understory ground cover are familiar and very useful. The hardy begonia is less familiar and really lovely. Its leaves are shaped more like some of the fancy rhizomatic begonias, most often a wonderful lime green with pink veins and lovely little pink flowers, and like the wax begonias happy with dappled shade. And it is hardy down to 6 degrees, disappearing in the winter and coming back in late June. If its happy it will carpet under your shrubs providing texture and pops of pink.

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Rhizomatous Begonia

Begonia is a genus of perennial flowering plants belonging to the family Begoniaceae. They are native to tropical and subtropical regions. - South and Central America, Asia, and Africa. A seventeenth century French botanist, Charles Plumier, is credited with discovering a new plant species that he named after Michel Begon who was a Haitian plant collector. But it wasn't until the nineteenth century when botanists began to study and classify begonias, with botanists in both England and Germany developing interest in studying begonias.

There are three categories of begonia: Fibrous, Tuberous and Rhizomatous.

The fibrous begonias include the familiar little wax leaf begonias, the showier angel wing begonias, and the common polka dotted leaf begonias. The angel wing begonias are particularly generous and genial. They grow happily in the garden with lovely foliage and bright red flowers, they are easily dug up and then will live happily in a pot inside. A stem of an angel wing will root in water and so mix into long lasting flower arrangements. And, little known fact, the flowers taste like pickles and are pretty in a salad. But don't let your pets eat them,

The tuberous begonias, Tuberhybrida, are the ones that have the incredibly showy flowers, mostly native to South America. Blackmore and Langdon began hybridizing and cultivating them in 1901 and continue to do so. There are a number of flower forms, single and multicolor, rose form, camellia form, ruffled petals, serrated petals, and glorious bright colors. Some are upright, some are wonderfully cascading. Tuberous begonias are definitely eye candy. I still remember the incredible display of them that I saw at a Wisley show outside of London.



Rhizomatous Begonia

But, by far the most interesting, I think, are the rhizomatous begonias. The variety of shapes and colors and textures of leaves that grow along those fleshy rhizomatous stems is mind boggling! They can produce a massive display of spring flowers. And they range in size from miniatures to huge plants with three feet leaves! These begonias want well drained soil, bright indirect light, and cool indoor temperatures. While the leaves don't like to get wet, these begonias like good humidity, setting them in trays but on pebbles is a good way to provide humidity. They have a reputation for being fussy, and I have found that some varieties I have fallen in love with and taken home thrive for years, others limp along, making it clear that my house is not a good match for them.

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Rhizomatous Begonia

Unlike hybrids or cultivars, the characteristics of species begonias have developed as a means of surviving in very specific environments. They demonstrate the wonders of biodiversity, and these days, many, many are endangered as their habitats shrink. The American Begonia Society is committed to ending research and conservation efforts to preserve and protect these habitats. At the same time, they encourage people to provide habitat for begonias in their own houseplant collections, caring for them, propagating new plants, and sharing!

Thanks to: The Spruce, The American Begonia Society, GardeningKnowHowTo.com, Epicgardening.com.