

How to Grow Tuberous Begonias

Capital Nursery



Growing tuberous begonias in the Sacramento area can be a beautiful and rewarding experience. With attentive care, protection from the hot summer sun, and increased humidity, healthy plants with sizable blooms up to 7 inches can be attained.

STARTING TUBERS: In late February, early March dormant tubers that have protruding 1/4 inch pink buds should be planted about 6 inches apart with the buds up in a planting flat filled with leaf mold or milled peat moss. The tubers should be fully covered up to 1 inch so roots will sprout all over the tuber. They must be kept moist, not soaking wet, in a protected area such as a greenhouse, garage, or storage shed. When the stems break through the surface of the mix, move the flats into natural light (no sun). If moved outdoors, cover at night to protect the still tender growth from possible late frosts. Lift the tubers from the flats without shaking any of the planting mix from the roots. This should be done when two full leaves have grown (3 to 5 inch high shoots).

GENERAL CULTURE: Plant in prepared beds or in pots. Remember that tuberous begonias have a front side. The blossoms face the same direction that the leaves point, so plant with the leaf points facing the front of the bed. For container growing, use plastic, wood, or clay pots at least 7 inches in diameter. Large, older tubers should have larger containers. The potting mix should be loose to drain well. One good formula is 1/3 leaf mold or milled peat moss, 1/3 potting soil (like Supersoil, and 1/3 mix good loam. Some growers add small amounts of perlite and vermiculite to loosen and add moisture retention to the mix. In beds or in pots plants should be staked to prevent toppling in summer winds.

To bloom well, they need as much light as possible without burning the foliage. In this area they need shade after 10:00am. Beds on the north side of a building or areas under trees can provide ideal light conditions. Shade cloth or lath should be around 60%. Some experimentation is often needed to find ideal conditions. Sometimes plants need more shade as the summer temperatures rise or as the sun lowers on the early fall horizon. Water plants thoroughly when the soil surface looks dry. Clay pots require more frequent watering than plastic. Provide extra humidity with extremely fine misters in the general area. The plants will tolerate the water easily if well shaded and applied early enough to dry before dark.

PESTS: Slugs, snails, cutworms and earwigs can be a problem. Try Master Nursery PestFighter Meal as required. Powdery mildew can be prevented or cured by spraying the plants With Green Light Fungaway or Monterey Fungi-Fighter.

FERTILIZER: All begonias are heavy feeders The first fertilization should be with Fish Emulsion when the transplants adjustment from the move from the flats. Fertilize every two weeks with a high nitrogen fertilizer like Romeo at Half strength. After the plant reaches mature size, change from growth formulation to a blooming one. If leaves look "hard" or curl down, they are being overfertilized.