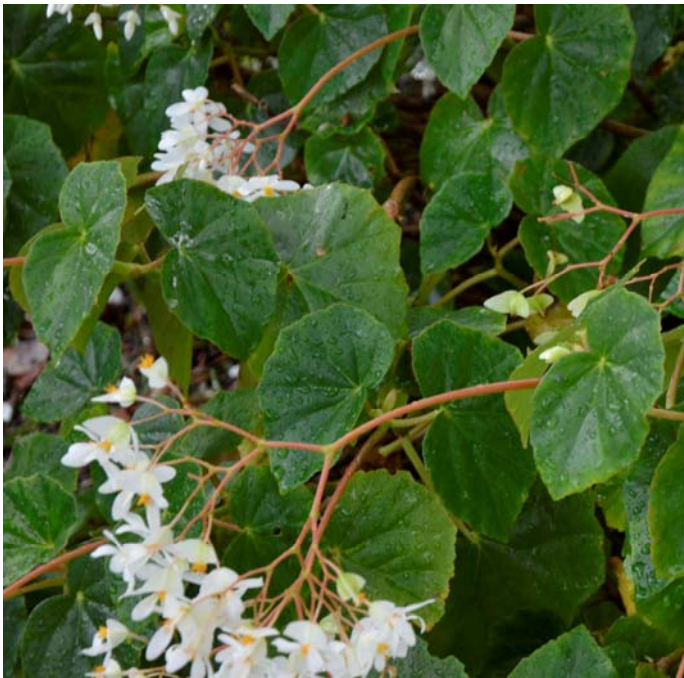


Begonia odorata 'Alba'

Family: Begoniaceae



Late December



Late December

Common Names: Begonia, Sweet Begonia, Tropical Begonia

Synonyms (discarded Names): *Begonia nitida odorata*

Origin: Caribbean

U.S.D.A. Zone: 10a-11 (32°F minimum)

Plant Type: Herbaceous, succulent perennial; annual in North Florida

Growth Rate: Medium

Leaf Persistence: Evergreen

Flowering Months: All year in South Florida

Flower Color: White

Light Requirements: Low, medium; dappled shade is best

Soil Salt Tolerance: Low

Drought Tolerance: Medium

Wind Tolerance: Low

Soil requirements: Moist, well drained

Nutritional Requirements: High when actively growing

Major Potential Pests: Nematodes and fungus diseases

Typical Dimensions: 12-36 inches high to 48 inches wide.

Propagation: Seeds and cuttings

Human Hazards: None

Uses: Specimen, container, edging, ground-cover

Species and Types

The USDA germplasm resources of information network (GRIN) lists 1,553 species of begonias. Few other plants have been improved or hybridized so rapidly. There are thousands of variations of these many species now in cultivation. Fanciers and collectors group them into types of growth (fibrous, rhizomatous, or tuberous) and habit (angel-wing, rex, cane, or semperflorens).

Origin

Sweet begonia's native range extend across the islands of the Caribbean. It grows in the wet mountain forests and in the sunny, drier regions along roadside across Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Grenada, Guadeloupe and Martinique. It was among the first begonia species encountered by exploring Europeans. Sweet begonia was the only begonia recorded by Carl Linnaeus in his book "Species Planatarum" published in 1753. The species is the reference-type for the genus Begonia.

Growth Habit

Sweet begonia is a cane-type, fibrous-rooted begonia. It is a perennial sub-shrub that grows to about 30 inches tall and potentially mounds to 48 inches. The stems are fleshy but partially wooded at the base of mature stems. The upper portions have prominent bamboo-like joints .



Cultivated sweet begonia growing in the hills of Jamaica in late January

Leaves

Leaves are alternate and simple. The blades are glossy, and dark green when well situated. The undersides are pale green. They are lobed and resemble jagged, lopsided ovals with a pointy tips. The base is asymmetrical, the margins are serrated and the venation palmate.

Flowers

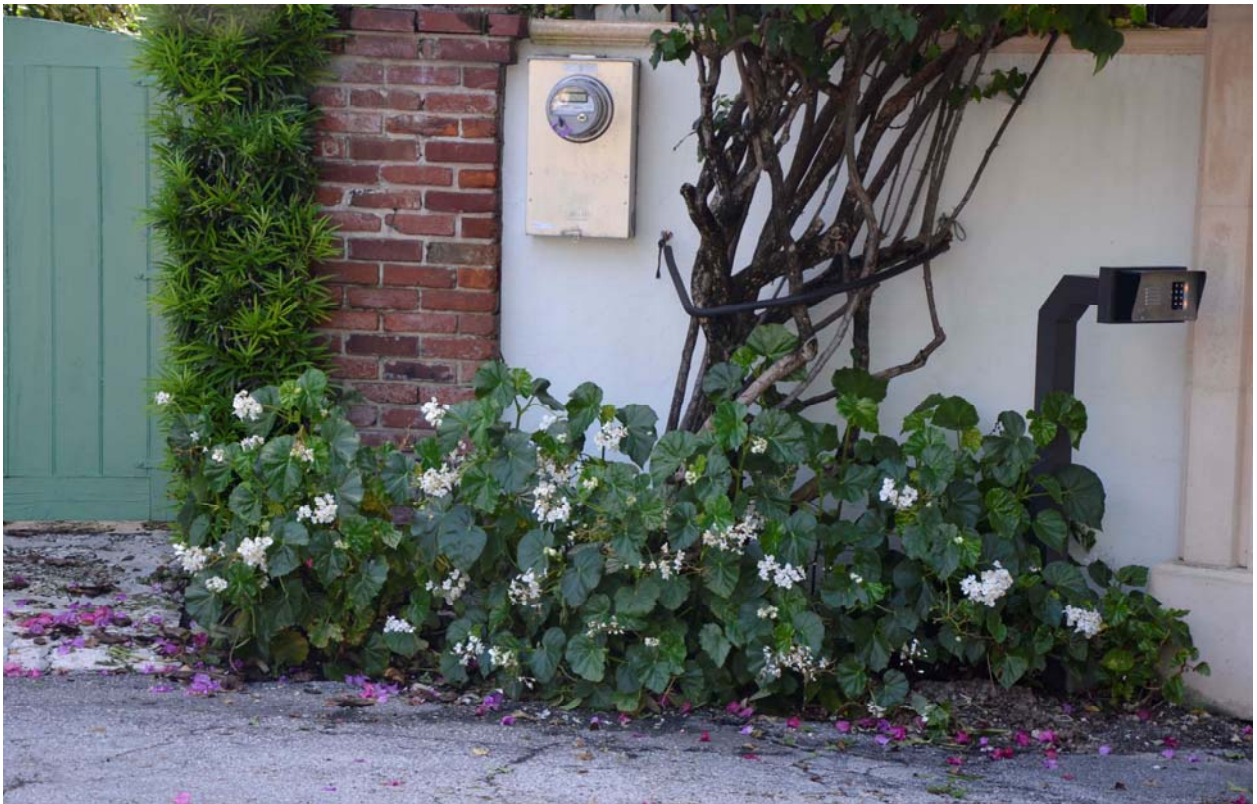
Flowers are pink-tinged or white colored. The colors divide *B. odorata* into its two varieties. *B. odorata* 'Rosea' is the pink-tinged colored and *B. odorata* 'Alba' is the white flowered variety. It flowers year round, but most heavily from fall to late spring. Flowers are borne on pendant, showy, asymmetrical cymes. The blooms taper off during the heat, rain and humidity of South Florida's summer. Leaves may partially obscure the flower stem, but the white flowers are readily seen above the contrasting dark green leaves. The flowers are lightly fragrant especially in the evening.



Leaves and flowers, early May



Pendant flowers, late December



Late February



Late April



Early May

Fruits

The rarely seen 3-lobed fruit capsules are split longitudinally, asymmetrical and usually winged.

Uses and Management

Sweet begonia can be used as an edging and bedding plant, in containers, as a groundcover and in night-gardens. The plant does best in partial, filtered or dappled shade but is capable of tolerating some full sun. Morning sun and afternoon shade provide superior culture for this begonia. Yet excessive sunlight will induce light green leaves and slower growth. Once planted they should not be disturbed too often.

Porous soils high in organic matter are the best growth medium. Soil can be kept moist but not soggy. Sweet begonia will tolerate more water than most. Nevertheless, loss of lower leaves may indicate over-watering.

Unpruned begonias tend to grow leggy. Pruning begonias stimulates new growth and encourages a more compact plant. In addition, flowers are more abundant on new growth. Plants may appear full, but on closer inspection there might be some canes that need to be pruned out. Remove these dead, dying, or old canes to the ground. This will allow new succulent stems to emerge directly from the soil. Selected canes can be removed at anytime of the year.

General pruning of the entire plant is best done in late winter or spring. Pruning over time allows the shrub to remain presentable in the garden. The best approach is to prune one-third of the shrub in February, a second third in March and the final third in April. During general pruning, do not remove the entire canes, instead cut them back to four or five nodes above the soil. Canes are brittle so be careful how you carry out this job. If not pruned, the stems can be alternatively pinched back in late winter or spring to discourage leggy growth.

Use a slow-release fertilizer at any time of the year. Begonias in full sun require more water and fertilizer to achieve their best look. Sweet begonia is easily propagated from softwood cuttings in the summer and fall.



Flowering may cease for a period during hot humid months of summer, late July

