



# Newsletter of the Auckland Begonia Circle

## June 2020

Condensed Auckland Begonia Circle Newsletter, due to disruption of the Circle's usual activities by Covid-19 restrictions.

**Due to the coronavirus restrictions still in place,  
the June meeting has been cancelled.**

### **Update to members**

Like bears emerging from hibernation we are now coming out of Covid-19 levels 4 and 3 and facing the conditions of Covid-19 level 2. Unfortunately, this means our next meeting June 13<sup>th</sup> will be cancelled. We could have a ten-person meeting, but it will be unfair to turn the eleventh person away from the meeting.

I trust you have all weathered the Level 4 shut down. Losing physical contact with family and friends is something we gregarious humans are not good at. If we have collectively managed to control Covid-19 then this is a great achievement by the people of this small country.

What absolute bliss having no cars on the road, being able to walk down the white line with no fear of being splattered, is a memory to relish. No background traffic noise makes you realise just how much noise pollution we have. The birds sounded so much sweeter.

In Auckland it has been a relatively dry autumn which is good for the begonias. I have noticed less rotting this year, which I put down to less humidity. You should have stopped watering tuberous begonias by now. As a rule, I normally make the last watering on Anzac Day. Try and keep any cutting plants still growing, as the bigger that tuber gets the better. Move them to a warm spot and reduce the shade a little and don't over-water.

I remove the stake from the pot and allow the stem to fall naturally. Some lay the pot on its side. Keep an eye out for caterpillars that infest the top of the tubers. They are very hard to see as they get just under the skin of the tuber, chomping away undetected. A drench of insecticide can help.

De-pot the tubers only when they are totally dried out, this includes the fine roots, they should just brush off. Damaged roots can be the entry point for rot. There are as many tuber storage methods as there are begonia growers. The most important is the humidity where they are kept. Dry but not so dry that they dehydrate. In sand, in sawdust, in paper, under the house, under the bed – the list goes on. In the light or dark doesn't matter, cool but not chilled. I leave mine on the glasshouse

bench covered in newspaper and the small ones wrapped in paper; they get a light spray of water if they are looking too dry.

It is always a problem to know what to do with the old mix. I reuse it in pots of spring bulbs and summer flowers. Just add a bit of slow release fertilizer and a little lime. There is nothing better to herald spring than yellow daffodils. I grow 'Tete-a-Tete', mini ones, they don't seem to require winter chilling as many other bulbs do. Lachenalias give a great show, brightening up the middle of winter and so easy to grow. I have a line of old-fashioned freesias from my mother-in-law's garden. The one with the strong scent. Unfortunately, they have a potential to take over the garden if they ever get out of the pot.

The Auckland Begonia Circle is a bit 'in limbo' currently. We are unsure as to when the next meeting is going to be. The August meeting is the tuber sale meeting; at this stage I hope it is going ahead. The Circle is still on the lookout for a Secretary, Treasure and President.

I do hope this newsletter finds you in good health and cheer.

*Graeme Peake  
Acting Secretary*

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*From the Editors:*

Greetings to you all. I hope that you are all enjoying being able to go out a bit more and catch up with a few friends and family, now. Reaching Level 2 has been a relief particularly for those who live alone and were grateful for contact with others again. For some, the Covid-19 lockdown has been an opportunity to spend more time in their garden. There should be lots of vegetable seedlings coming on all over the country, after the great rush on them just before lockdown, at the garden centres. Your begonias are likely to have had at least as much attention as usual, maybe a bit more.

Alan Baldick, in Auckland, reports that he has had a fairly normal season, and his plants are dying down now, some already drying off. He has chopped back by one-third the tops of his parent tubers. He had a few flowers on his tuberous begonias to give away up until about a week ago. Growers in the South Island that he is in contact with report that their plants 'shut down' earlier, because of cooler temperatures, which makes sense.

He is experimenting with growing cuttings in different ways. We hope for a report later. But when his cuttings have developed roots and have been moved to the greenhouse, he covers them at night with frost cloth and a thick layer of newspaper – a useful tip if you live in a frosty area.

Mary Johnson, in Rotorua, says that about half of her tubers have died down and are put away for winter, but the rest are not ready to die down yet, because it has been a mild autumn. She is getting ready to plant seeds now. As usual, there is a lot of interest in the seed she produces.

Ron Exelby, that grower of excellent begonias, has settled in well after he and Cherry moved to Cambridge, but he has no begonias of his own now. He keeps in touch with Mary, and she appreciates his interest and advice.

Continue to keep busy as winter sets in, keep well and be kind.

*Nick and Elizabeth Miller*

## Reminiscences – Jim Gardiner

Jim Gardiner was my uncle. As a child I loved visiting Uncle Jim and Aunt Francis in Matamata. We lived in Te Aroha and then moved to Matamata when I was seven. They had no children of their own and Uncle Jim called us (myself and 2 sisters) his girls. I remember his garden, there was a waterfall and fishpond with a bridge over it, a large orchard with all kinds of fruit. He grew all his own vegetables. Most impressive were the two large glasshouses, one for orchids and one for begonias and a small building which was always very hot. I now know that that was his propagating shed. Ever since I can remember, Uncle Jim and my father were interested in all aspects of gardening. As we grew older, we still visited and would be given hanging baskets often named after our children. Sadly, I knew little about growing begonias and these only lasted a season. In hindsight I wish I had started an interest in growing them when he was still alive.

*Robyn Downs*

*We never met Jim Gardiner, but he was well-known in the orchid world as well as amongst begonia growers, and to keen gardeners in general.*

*Editors*

## Remembering the 2020 Show



Sharing years of experiences – one of the pleasures and joys of Begonia Shows. (Photos: Elizabeth Miller)



## Reviving an iron cross begonia

A year or so ago I was given a young plant of iron cross begonia, *Begonia masoniana*. It spent its first winter in a warmish terrarium, then went out to the greenhouse in the spring. Come mid to late autumn, we noticed that it was starting to look unhappy and losing foliage. This species does tend to be in need of warmth. I put it back in the terrarium in about mid-April, and within a week it was starting to produce new foliage. It now looks very much happier than before it was brought inside, with several healthy leaves, each one bigger than the previous one. So the motto for *Begonia masoniana* seems to be to give it gentle warmth and humidity in the cooler months. This begonia makes an extremely handsome plant and is well worth taking a little trouble over.

Nick Miller



*Begonia masoniana*, with new growth in May, a few weeks after being moved to a terrarium from the cooling greenhouse. Photo: Nick & Elizabeth Miller

## **TUBEROUS BEGONIAS**

English, Scottish, Australian and NZ named Begonias Standards and Cascades

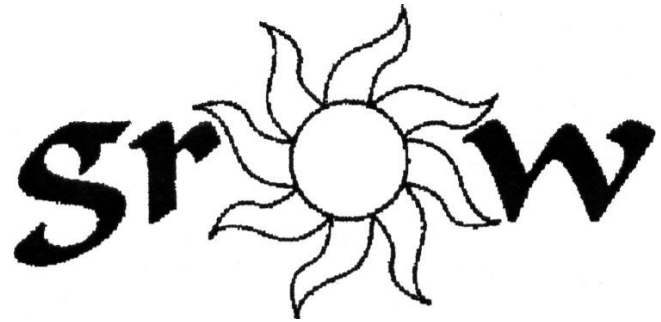
**2020 Catalogue on request**

**Alan Baldick**

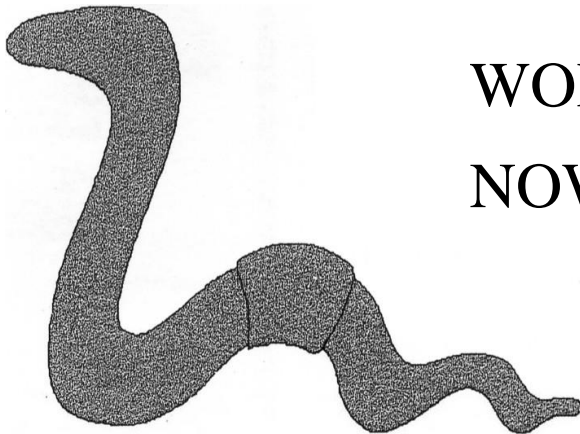
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## Begonia display cheers Rotorua locals

Some of you have visited Ian and Mary Johnson's house and garden at Rotorua and seen their magnificent display of tuberous begonias in their front garden and also in the pool courtyard behind the house. It has featured in the ABC newsletter from time to time.

The display is well-known by locals in the immediate area, so during the Covid-19 lockdown, local people out for their walk would come past Mary and Ian's garden to enjoy the begonia display.

Mary usually dismantles the display, involving dozens of pots, when daylight saving ends (5<sup>th</sup> April this year), but this year, following suggestions, they left their front garden display in place until recently, well into May, as local residents continued to come past on their walks. Plants in the front garden that finished flowering were replaced by plants from behind the house, to maintain the display. That beautiful garden would have given pleasure to those passing by, looking for some interest outside their own gate. What a kind contribution to have made. Well done, Mary and Ian.

There are no doubt other gardens throughout New Zealand that gave interest and pleasure to people walking by during the Covid-19 Level 4 and 3 days, getting a little exercise near their homes.

Gardens and flowers are known to contribute to community and individual well-being, so we can all be pleased to be part of that.

*Editors*

### **AUCKLAND BEGONIA CIRCLE 2019 – 2020**

Website: [aucklandbegoniacircle.org.nz](http://aucklandbegoniacircle.org.nz)

Email address: [aucklandbegoniacircle@gmail.com](mailto:aucklandbegoniacircle@gmail.com)

Postal address: c/- 14 Keenagh Rise, Dannemora, Auckland 2016

Phone: (09) 272 3631

**PRESIDENT:** position vacant

**PATRONS:** Graham Milne phone (09) 4444795

Kate Wiggins phone (09) 2783337

**HONORARY AUDITOR:** Noel Pascoe

**SECRETARY:** Graeme Peake/Noelene Murdoch (interim)

**TREASURER:** Graeme Peake/Noelene Murdoch (interim)

**COMMITTEE:**

Mike Atkins phone 021 02256561

Gael Dobbs phone (09) 2686358

Robyn Downs (09) 5344994

Jamila Ibrahim phone (09) 2623002

Ian Joblin phone (09) 2981147

Graeme Peake phone (09) 2723631

Karen Rose phone (09) 2673312