



AUSTIN AREA BEGONIA SOCIETY

A Branch of the American Begonia Society

Website: http://www.kenfuchs42.net/aabs_index.html



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NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2025

Freda Holley, Ken Fuchs, Editors

NEXT MEETING

Sunday, August 24 1:30 P.M.

Zilker Botanical Garden Center
2220 Barton Springs Road
Austin, TX 78746

From Doug:

This month's program will be a cutting and plant swap. There may be some plants for sale. We will have a short program about propagating. Feel free to bring your plant/plants that you will be swapping cuttings from so everyone can see the mature plant. Plants/cuttings of non begonias are welcome.

Please bring your cuttings in a plastic bag and extra baggies to take cuttings home. If you have one, bring a sharpie to write the name of the cutting on the baggie.

We have a new Facebook Group page. Check it out at **Austin Area Begonia Society (AABS)**.

This was set up by Frank DiZenzo, thanks Frank. If you are looking for a specific plant, post it on the group page. If anyone has it they can be sure and bring you a cutting.

FACEBOOK



Austin Area Begonia Society (AABS)
© 2016 group: 22 members

THE UNIDENTIFIED BEGONIAS:

WHAT THEY ARE AND WHERE THEY CAME FROM

by Freda Holley

If you keep up with the new begonia discoveries happening every day in both the Far East and in South America, you will have a feeling for what it was like back in the U.S. in the mid-century 1900s with new begonia discoveries. There were so many explorers out searching for new plants, then bringing them home and giving them their own numbers that naturally there were also many duplications. Two ABS members, Thelma O'Reilly (photo) in San Diego and Carrie Karegeannes, associated back East with the Smithsonian Institute, perceived this as a disaster in the making. So they proposed to ABS that it bring order to the situation. Thus began the Unidentified listing of new-found begonias whose botanical identity could not be confirmed. This fit well with another new task ABS took on at about that time. It became the registration body for newly developed begonia cultivars. Both listings were to be published in the *Begonian* to make it all official.



By the time I came along as the new *Begonian* editor in 1997, after a number of short-term editors had moved on and Thelma had become the very busy authority on both begonias and bromeliads, the listing was very out of date. I found it no easy task to correct that. Thelma and I worked out that she would give me 10 numbers to be published in each issue of the *Begonian*. However, she had been so busy that her own records were often unavailable because of missing photos or data, but Thelma really loved the position and held it too long. By the time Mary Buchholz of Florida was appointed to the job, many records were incomplete and some numbers with no records at all, but we brought the listing up to date.

In addition to the *Begonian* listings, someone — I think possibly Howard Berg — had put together a typed listing of the available Unidentified from the published list. Howard had also issued a listing of all the cultivars he had identified up to that time. This was a listing of thousands including those listed in Mildred Thompson's book: *Begonias A Complete Guide*. This is important because the formal registration process was so onerous, few people were registering their cultivars.

Anyway, I took Howard's U# Listing along with all those newly added

in the *Begonian* and put out a new booklet with one subsequent updated listing. Mary Bucholtz and Charles Jaros then published a new updated listing during Mary's tenure, but by this time technology was catching up with our printed booklets with there being an online listing by the Houston Branch and now all the Unidentified #'s have been added to the Ross Bolwell Australian International Database of the Begoniaceae (IDB: <https://ibegonias.clientportal.cloud/#/>). I am normally not a big fan of digital books or booklets, but I have to admit that this is one place where it is not only appropriate, but better.

Typical information you might find on a U# listing:



B. U604 bloom

Begonia U604 is an unidentified tuberous begonia species. It's characterized by its spotted leaves, which some have described as having a metallic shine. This begonia is notable for growing well and blooming in reflected light. It's from Arunachal Pradesh, India, found by Rekah Morris.

ABS' FAMOUS HYBRIDIZERS: THE HYBRIDS OF BELVA NELSON KUSLER (1910-1995)

by Bernice Brilmayer

Reprinted from *The Begonian*, October 1961



Wisconsin natives –
Belva Nelson Kusler
and her pet raccoon
Jimmy Valentine

Belva Nelson Kusler, hailed from Siren, Wisconsin and first mentioned in *The Begonian* in 1950 for her excellent collection of Begonias, but it was not long at all before she was introducing new cultivars! Her first release was the cane type B. 'Anna Christine' which was created in 1950, then registered and released in 1955. She spoke about developing B. 'Anna Christine'.



B. 'Anna Christine'

It was one of more than two hundred floriferous seedlings of 'Salmon Rubra' x B. *dichroa*, and the only one with dark leaves, brilliant flowers, and small stature. She wanted to produce begonias that could be raised indoors, so she did not use a greenhouse. All her hybrids were raised indoors. She said "My chief interest is in the production of plants, both beautiful and unique, that blossom profusely year round and are amenable to house conditions."

Belva began growing begonias in World War II, she moved from Chicago to Wisconsin while her husband was in the Navy. She began hybridizing at the age of 55 and had returned to Wisconsin because it was where her roots were, her family had been part of a Danish settlement in that area. She and her husband Al (1910-2001) raised their two children, twins, Jon and Jill, and were now empty nesters so there was space and time to hybridize begonias. Quickly they filled her home.

[By the 1960's Belva was well known for her hybridizing. As was usual for those years, Belva's hybrids needed an outlet so others could buy them and the supplier that Belva worked with first was Tropical Paradise Greenhouse in Overland, KS.]

BEGONIA CLASSIFICATION

In the early days of the American Begonia Society in California and New England, emerging begonia groups were meeting and soon having shows and trying to organize their plants in meaningful ways to give awards. Because of the begonias diversity this was not an easy task. Committees were appointed by the American Begonia Society resulting in language changes in the way we all talk about begonias. You will find these printed and exhibited at every large ABS show.

I will discuss the changes using the terms and groups we now use to categorize and discuss our begonias beginning with the Cane-like Begonias.

Cane-Like Begonias are first divided into two 'Divisions' or broad groups — 'Superba' and 'All Others'. The later Division is further divided into 4 Classes or subdivisions: Mallet, Low Growing, Intermediate, and Tall.



B. aconitifolia



B. 'Irene Nuss'

The Superba group is small having only three species: *B. aconitifolia* noted for developing a rather large and noticeable caudex as well as some famous hybrids such as B. 'Irene Nuss', *B. platanifolia*, and



B. leathermaniae

B. leathermaniae. The latter is noted for its beautifully colored young leaves while later leaves are simply dark green. I hybridized extensively with the Superbas to capture their large leaves and flower clusters in hybrids such as B. 'Pagoda', B. 'Taylor Anne', B. 'Triplet', and B. 'Willow'. All grew very tall and full with large bloom clusters.



B. 'Pagoda'



B. 'Willow'

The Mallet begonias include such beauties as B. 'Tingey Mallet', 'Maurice Amey', 'Don Miller', and 'Arabian Sunset'.



B. 'Arabian Sunset'

The Low Growing, generally at around 2 feet, are often seen in hanging baskets. The Intermediate come in at 2 to 4 feet; these are all popular as they are easy growers.

The final group is the tall growing and I think it is best exemplified by B. *maculata*. Although it can be held to a relatively small, very full and beautiful plant with its very large white dots on dark green leaves, when left alone as I tend to do with all my begonias, it easily tops 6 feet. When crossed with the Superbas, you get dramatically beautiful plants with huge white flower clusters.



B. *maculata*

All the Cane-Like begonias have 56 chromosomes and cross with each other easily. Although Superbas have been reported to have 60, they too cross with other canes easily as well. However chromosomes can be very difficult to count and it is possible the count is wrong, but there is also a genetic explanation

to explain how the crosses can be possible even if the count is accurate.

So here is the first group classification and because of that genetic sameness, they are also the easiest to present. Next time will come the Rhizomatous group, the largest and most difficult to present or exhibit.

MEETING CALENDAR

July 27, 2025 Meeting:

Our program was on hostas as companion plants to begonias. Everyone who wanted one received a free hosta; some received two. There is one followup note to remember: hostas are perennials so if they soon disappear on you, don't discard them. Label the pot and put it in the coldest shady spot away from the heat from your house so it can emerge and surprise you in the spring. When it does, up-pot it and immediately begin feeding and watering it. This also tells you it is time to buy or order new ones if you want to increase your varieties.

The club gifted Nelda with a small but lovely potted plant as a thank you for her many years of service as the editor of the AABS newsletter.

September 6, 2025 11AM to 12PM

TWIG (Walks and Talks in the Zilker Botanic Garden). We are doing propagation of begonias in Plastic bags. All helpers are welcome. If you have a cutting you would like to donate tell Doug Byrom.

September 28, 2025 2:00-4:PM Japanese Kokedama Balls



October 26?, 2025 Time to be set. Annual luncheon at Jim and Joan Estes home in Lockhart

OUR JULY 27, 2025 AABS MEETING
(PHOTOS BY JIM LANDERS)



