

The Varied History of The Begonia

History states that more than three centuries ago, about 1649, the first Tuberous Begonia was found in Mexico by Father Franz Hernandez and listed in botanical records as Totoncacoxo Coyollin. It is also referred to in Chinese fable where a princess adorned her hair with the blooms. Ancient embroideries also depict early species in the art work of Japan under the name Sjukaïdo. In 1654 tuberous begonias were found in the East Indies and named *Empetrum Acetosum*. Then in 1688 Sir Hans Sloane found plants in Jamaica which are known today as *Begonia acutifolia*.

A few years back it was generally believed that these plants could only be grown in certain spots around San Francisco, Capitola, San Luis Obispo, San Diego and Seattle areas but can now be found in many parts of the world, the gardens at Capitola being internationally famous.

There are hundreds of varieties throughout the world with four main types, the most popular being Picotee, Rose, Ruffled and Hanging. Less common types are the Single Crested, Single Frilled and Bushy Multaflora. The hybrids shipped from the U.S. are now cultivated commercially in England, Belgium,

Germany, Australia and New Zealand, the major hub of the industry still centering around Capitola.

Begonia seed is worth much more than its weight in gold, the ruffled varieties costing up to \$1,800 an ounce and the hanging basket varieties as much as \$2,600. The plant has a normal life of about six years and gradually lose their ability to produce good blooms. The color range covers the rainbow except for the blue and purple spectrum. Blooms will average from five to six inches in width, some attaining a size of ten inches across. In semi-shade and plenty of air, the blossom will last two weeks or more. The Monterey Bay climate is ideal for the begonia and gives it a maximum chance for survival during the first year of growth and a surprising number of blooms every summer and fall..

Flowers for the Begonia Festival are donated each year by the growers and gathered by various organizations to decorate the floats and establishments. Thousands of people from all over the west coast flock to Capitola every year to attest to the skills of the botanists and pioneer growers of the area and the artistic abilities and imagination of the Festival contestants.