

Bodacious BEGONIAS

Boasting diversity, adaptability and performance in 2019 trials, these begonias deserve your attention.

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The prolific breeding and interspecific hybridization and introduction of new begonia cultivars, specifically in the past 10 years, is unprecedented. The commercial varieties available today originated from wild sources throughout the world, and the variation in colorful foliage, habit, unique flower forms and colors is immense. The gene pool is significant with over 1,300 species of annuals, perennials, shrubs and climbers.

The advancements from international breeders in seed and vegetative forms for production application in packs, combinations and baskets is unparalleled.

We began marketing, promoting and selling vegetative begonias such as Lois Burks, Cherry Blossom, and Richmondensis in the 1980s and Dragon Wing in 1992. Fast forward to 2019 and we had more than eight international breeders represented in the flower trials, with entries in many classes including semperflorens, hiemalis, tuberous and boliviensis. I have focused on current and new begonia introductions in multiple trials last summer — but specifically in late summer in the Northern trials, which includes Michigan, Colorado, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

When using bodacious in the title of the article I am referring to the bold and audacious flower form, floriferousness, and the profusion of distinctive colors.

1. 'SPRING FLING BUTTERCUP'

Ball Ingenuity

This vegetative series is comprised of two colors: Buttercup and Pink Tulip. Both varieties have large, single, vibrant flowers with a compact habit and dark foliage. I was impressed with the free flowering habit and heat and humidity tolerance throughout the summer. Both varieties mature at 12 to 16 inches, and have production application in baskets and combinations in shade to partial shade. They were in multiple summer trials, and Spring Fling Buttercup — with its large single yellow flowers with a rose blush — was floriferous and distinctive.

2. 'ON TOP SUNSET SHADES'

PanAmerican Seed

Five AmeriHybrid tuberous begonia series derived from seed were introduced last year: Picotee, Roseform, Ruffled, On Top and Sun Dancer. This is a wide collection of novelty and bicolor varieties. They are recommended for partial to full shade, and many were in the Northern trials last summer, including the On Top series, which continued to flower profusely through late August in a shade environment with excellent heat tolerance. There are five colors in this series, and they manifested a compact growth habit with an eye-catching flower canopy. Sunset Shades with bicolor yellow flowers tipped with a red edge was one of the most impressive in the summer trials.

3. 'MISTRAL PINK'

Selecta One

We have an assortment of boliviensis vegetative and seed series available from multiple breeders. Selecta One introduced the Mistral series in 2016 with Yellow and Pink and have since added Dark Red, Orange and Double Orange. This series is characterized by lanceolate, serrated green leaves; elongated cascading flowers; and a compact habit with tight internodes. The varieties manifest excellent heat and drought tolerance, can be used in partial sun in the Northern regions, and make an outstanding series for bench run basket programs.

4. 'DREAMS BEAUVILIA HOT PINK'

Beekenkamp

The vegetative Beauvilia series is comprised of four colors, including Dark Salmon and Hot Pink for 2020. The Beauvilias are part of the extensive Dreams assortment, which includes multiple collections of the Waterfalls, Fragrant Falls, BK, Barkos, Ilona and Solenia series. The boliviensis Beauvilia Red and White were introduced a few years ago and have manifested outstanding summer performance in partial shade trials in the South and in full sun exposure in the Northern trials. The new introductions continued this level of performance with an abundance of large single flowers, mounded cascading habit, minimal dead heading, and heat and humidity tolerance. Hot Pink with the

yellow center was extremely vibrant and floriferous. This series has demonstrated its excellence in basket production and now, with four colors, offers a more complete package.

5. 'FUNKY LIGHT PINK'

Benary

The Benary name is synonymous with begonias. The extensive portfolio includes the boliviensis Sun Cities Collection; the semperflorens Cocktail, Sprint Plus, Sprint and Super Olympia; the tuberhybridas Illumination, New Star, Nonstop, Nonstop Mocca; and the benariensis series Big, Big Deluxe and Whopper. The Funky begonias are the latest in a series of hybrid interspecifics from Benary. This series combines the large colorful flowers of a tuberosa with the heat tolerance of the boliviensis. This seed series is comprised of five colors: Light Pink, Orange, Pink, Scarlet and White. The flowers have transitional colors and single, semi-double and double flowers on the same plant. The series has excellent application in mixed containers and hanging baskets, and can tolerate partial sun and full shade. Pink was outstanding in the trials with a multicolored flower of bright pink with hot pink venation and a yellow center. The Proven Select program from Proven Winners incorporates many Benary begonias including the Funky, Illumination and Nonstop series, and the standalone varieties, Joy and Santa Cruz.

6. 'I'CONIA PORTOFINA SUNRISE'

Dümmen Orange

Dümmen Orange's begonia portfolio is extensive, with begonias for multiple production programs and consumer applications in mono and mixed containers and hanging baskets. I focused on the outstanding performance of specific begonia varieties in the Southern trials in my September 2018 article. One of the series that manifested an excellent habit, dark foliage and a colorful canopy was the I'Conia Portofina series, and in particular Sunrise and Citrix. These varieties were in multiple trials under shade conditions and flowered prolifically through late summer. The eye-catching Sunrise has golden yellow, double blossoms with a rose blush, which are positioned well above the foliage. The features of this series include uniformity, excellent branching, and bicolor and multicolored double flowers. This variety was one of the top performers in the Penn State trials last summer.

7. 'SHINE BRIGHT WHITE'

Westhoff

Westhoff began a comprehensive begonia breeding program in 2010 and introduced the hybrid RiseUp and boliviensis Shine Bright series in 2017 at California Spring Trials. They have been in summer trials every year since their introduction and are now in many production programs throughout the country. We have many boliviensis series from seed and vegetative cuttings available from multiple breeders, and they are comparable in summer performance. Some of the differences include color, flower form, sun tolerance and habit. The Shine Bright series is comprised of four colors: Amore Red, Pink, Red and White. The elongated single flowers are positioned above the foliage with conspicuous and eye-catching yellow style, stigmas and anthers. This is a versatile cascading series for sun or shade. Shine Bright White has been a top performer in regional trials since its introduction. Westhoff will augment the begonia assortment with the dark-leaf Mahogany series in 2021 and will expand the color range of the Shine Bright collection.

8. 'FRAGRANT FALLS PEACH'

Beekenkamp

This hanging basket series is comprised of two tuberhybrida varieties: Peach and Lemon. The inflorescence with pendulous single flowers maturing to double forms was one of most vivacious in last year's summer trials. The flowers are multicolored, large and aromatic, which is distinguishable and sets it apart from other series. Both varieties have a long flower period and bloomed prolifically in the northern trials in shade locations. This is a series for hanging basket and container production, and will exhibit a colorful and prodigious flower canopy for retail display.

9. 'BOSSA NOVA ROSE'

Syngenta Flowers

This boliviensis seed series was bred and introduced in 2014 by Floranova, which recently was acquired by Syngenta. There are seven colors in the series including the latest addition, the dark-leaf Night Fire Papaya. The series has been in regional trials the past five years and has demonstrated a well-branched cascading habit, short internodes, uniformity, and adaptability in sun or shade. The bell-shaped single flowers are prolific and continuous throughout the summer season.





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This is an extremely versatile series used in small containers, combinations and baskets. Various colors have been in the Raker-Roberta's trial for many years in a full sun exposure, and they have flowered profusely through late August and maintained a dense, cascading habit. Rose was particularly vibrant and floriferous in the late summer trials.

10. 'WATERFALLS ENCANTO ORANGE IMPROVED'

Beekenkamp

Beekenkamp offers two boliviensis series: the Beauvilia, which I mentioned previously, and the Waterfalls, with two subseries. The Angel series is more upright and single, with softer subtle pastel colors, and the Encanto series is free-branching and vivid. Encanto is comprised of four sizzling colors: Orange Improved, Pink, Red and White. All four colors were uniform and floriferous throughout the summer. Encanto Orange Improved was especially eye catching in the Raker-Roberta's trial. The attributes include lustrous green foliage, elongated flowers and continuous flowering throughout the summer. The varieties bloom prolifically in full sun or partial shade in the Northern regions and perform better with shade conditions in the south. This is a very durable and distinctive series with high impact at retail.

11. 'BK EVI BRIGHT PINK'

Beekenkamp

This elatior hybrid series is comprised of eight double colors, including the new Esme Peach for 2020. It is characterized by a uniform, mounded habit with mid-sized double flowers. This series has been a top performer in regional trial sites and is a component in many multiple

season production programs. Very few series can rival the floriferousness, extended flowering period, shelf life and strong color retention throughout the summer season. Evi Bright Pink, as well as the entire series, has a richness and color saturation that is exceptional. Production applications include quarts, 6-inch pots, mixed containers and baskets.

12. 'TOPHAT ROSE BICOLOR'

Syngenta Flowers

The interspecific Tophat series debuted in 2018, was entered in summer trials in 2018 and 2019, and was included in spring production programs in 2019. There are four colors in the series, including Rose Bicolor for 2020, which was entered and trialed in many regional sites last summer. This series has many attributes, including vigor, earliness, excellent branching, fast finish, large flowers, and sun and heat tolerance. The flower size rivals or exceeds other interspecific series and the flower position on the foliage canopy creates a colorful plant for large packs and container production with excellent retail appeal. Based on performance in trial beds, this series has excellent application in landscape sites. Rose Bicolor was a standout throughout the summer in the Southern and Northern trials, with distinctive large non-fading single bicolor flowers.

13. 'VIKING XL RED ON CHOCOLATE'

Sakata

Sakata introduced the Viking series, comprised of the standard and the more vigorous XL varieties, at the 2019 California Spring Trials and entered many colors in the regional summer trials. The series is promoted as an all-weather begonia, and based on summer performance it

fulfills this objective. The standards matured at 18 to 24 inches in trial beds and the XLs at 28 to 34 inches. Both classes were tightly branched with XLs displaying slightly more vigor, and larger flowers and leaves. They were comparable in floriferousness. Three different leaf colors are available, and there are eight varieties in the standards and four in the XLs. 'Viking XL Red on Chocolate' was recognized as an All-America Selections Winner for its unique deep chocolate foliage which differentiates it from all other Begonias in this class. The standards are recommended for 4- and 6-inch pots and combinations, and the XLs for larger containers including 6-inch, gallons, 8-inch, combinations, and baskets.

14. 'NONSTOP JOY YELLOW'

Benary

When this standalone tuberous begonia was introduced in 2015, it appeared to have the same features and benefits of the outstanding Nonstop series. The question was, why promote it as a separate variety? Its uniqueness and multiple attributes have been demonstrated in trials and production programs. It is one of the most versatile begonias on the market. It can be grown and displayed in full sun or partial sun in the Northern regions, and full shade in the South. It has a mounded but slightly trailing habit, earliness, durability, large yellow double frilly flowers, minimal deadheading and a prodigious flower canopy. It is currently in the Proven Winners begonia liner program and is ubiquitous in spring programs throughout the country. Application includes quarts, combinations, and mixed and monocultural baskets. Breeding of new colors is continuing with a few experimental colors for 2021-22. [gpn](http://gpn.com)