

Beginner Guide to Begonias

Arrival care and everyday growing

Welcome to your new begonia! This guide is for foliage begonias, including cane, rex, rhizomatous and terrarium types. Follow any variety-specific instructions included with your plant.

Start here when your box arrives

Unpack gently and immediately. Your begonia typically ships on the drier side. Support the pot and root ball; never pull by leaves or stems. Remove shipping materials carefully and photograph the arrival condition. Check the mix; if it is dry, give it a good drink and let excess water drain fully. Provide 70% or higher humidity during arrival recovery, with gentle airflow. Keep it separate from your collection while you observe it.

Give the roots a gentle landing

Many foliage begonias have fine, delicate roots; rex and other rhizomatous types often root shallowly. Their root systems may look much less substantial than the thick roots of many aroids. Fine roots can be injured by shipping movement, uprooting or washing away substrate.

If the plant is stable in its pot, leave the root ball intact while it settles and resumes growth. Avoid immediate repotting, root washing or repeated tugging to check for roots. Use a small pot suited to the root mass with an airy mix and drainage. A larger pot is not automatically better.

Humid air and soggy roots are different

Many begonias appreciate higher air humidity, especially young propagations and sensitive species. That does not mean their substrate should stay saturated. A humidifier or suitable growing enclosure can help; provide gentle ventilation and avoid routine leaf misting or water sitting on the crown.

For Wild Bunny arrivals, aim for 70% or higher relative humidity during recovery, especially for young propagations and sensitive varieties. High humidity means moisture in the air, not soggy roots. Provide gentle airflow and monitor daily. Once settled and growing, match the longer-term humidity to the variety; many established cane types tolerate lower humidity.

Water by the substrate rather than the calendar

Let the mix dry partially between watering, but never let the entire root ball dry out completely. Begonias do not like to keep their feet wet! Water thoroughly when needed, then drain excess; never leave the pot standing in water. Aim for airy, lightly moist substrate rather than constant saturation. Small pots and young propagations need closer moisture checks.

A wilted plant is not automatically a thirsty plant. If the mix is wet, more water can make root trouble worse. Check moisture first.

Choose gentle light and stable conditions

Bright indirect light is a good starting point for most foliage begonias. Some shade-adapted rhizomatous or terrarium types tolerate lower light, but a dark corner is not ideal for every begonia. Cane types generally need brighter filtered light for strong growth. Avoid harsh direct sun, AC drafts and sudden changes.

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Understanding propagations and shipping changes

What does lightly rooted mean

A lightly rooted propagation is a young cutting that has started making roots but is still developing its root system. It is a different growth stage from an established plant. A small amount of fine root growth can be appropriate for that stage, but the cutting still needs supportive care.

Root size alone does not tell the whole story. Look for firm, healthy tissue and, over time, new roots or growth. A fresh unrooted cutting, a lightly rooted prop and an established plant are different descriptions; check the listing so you know which stage you purchased.

Help a young propagation establish

Keep its existing roots and substrate together. Use a small draining container and lightly moist propagation medium. Provide gentle indirect light and stable humidity. A clear vented dome or loosely closed clear bag can help if the prop needs humidity support; keep it out of direct sun and check daily.

Do not keep adding water because the enclosure looks humid. Avoid constant dripping condensation and stagnant conditions. Once roots and new growth are developing, gradually increase ventilation over several days or longer rather than removing the humidity support all at once. Wait for active growth before feeding.

How begonias make new plants

Cane and many shrub types: Use a healthy stem cutting with a node, the point where leaves or buds emerge. A detached cane begonia leaf may root without producing a new plant.

Rex and many rhizomatous types: Depending on the variety, a whole leaf with its stalk, a leaf section containing a major vein, or a rhizome division can produce plantlets. Not every begonia grows from every kind of cutting.

Use clean tools, an appropriate lightly moist medium, gentle light and humidity support. Keep the growing point above the medium. Rooting and plantlet formation can take weeks or longer; healthy remaining tissue may grow again even if an older leaf declines.

Shipping stress and warning signs

Begonias are notoriously dramatic! They can look a little sad after shipping. Give them time to recover. Wilted leaves often perk up after a good drink when the mix is dry, plus higher humidity. Check moisture first: if the mix is already wet, more water can worsen root trouble.

A bent leaf, a broken petiole, a few crispy edges, temporary drooping or an older leaf dropping can happen after transit or an environment change. These signs alone do not prove that the whole plant is dying. Existing damage will not repair itself; watch the health of the stem, crown and new growth.

Act promptly: Soft or mushy stems or crowns, a foul smell, rapidly spreading translucent damage, or worsening collapse in wet substrate need attention. Photograph the problem and contact us through your purchase platform before making major changes. Do not dismiss these signs as routine shipping stress.

Quick reminder: Handle gently. Check before watering. Protect the roots. Match humidity and light to the variety. Give new growth time.

Further reading: American Begonia Society, Vegetative Propagation (begonias.org/vegetative-propagation); RHS, Begonias as Houseplants (rhs.org.uk/plants/begonias/houseplants). General guidance; individual varieties and growing media differ.