



Culture tips for 'ESCARGOT'

Not only does it finish quickly, this *Begonia rex* variety also resists diseases and insects.

By Ryan Case



Healthy Escargot during production.

The leaves of this *Begonia rex* variety twist and curl in a spiral reminiscent of a snail's shell — thus the name 'Escargot'. It has a small, white flower but is mainly grown for its outstanding foliage. The plant was hybridized in The Netherlands and was introduced into the United States at The Ohio Short Course in 2000.

Escargot is versatile, attractive and tough and was hybridized to resist diseases. It has been used in hanging baskets, in 8- and 10-inch pots and in combination planters to add a bold texture with season-long interest. But the primary use seems to be in 4 1/2- to 6-inch pots grown as an impulse or gift item. Escargot is available year-round and sells at upscale florists, garden centers and supermarkets.

CULTURE

Use a well-drained soil and maintain a pH at approximately 6.8. Optimum light levels should be 1,500-2,500 foot candles, with extra shade provided during the summer. Fertilize with 20-10-20 on a weekly basis. Escargot is sensitive to accumulations of salts in the substrate, so you should leach salts periodically or maintain an EC below 2.0. Optimum temperature should be 64° F at night and 75° F

during the day. When temperatures are higher, reduce the amount of nitrogen. Escargot can tolerate ammonium forms of nitrogen, with total nitrogen not to exceed 240 ppm. In locations with adequate light, growth regulators are not necessary. However, in low-light locations, spray Cycocel weekly at a very low concentration, starting at 4 oz. per 100 gallons.

FINISHING

A 4 1/2-inch pot with one liner per pot or a 6-inch pot with two liners per pot each take approximately 6-8 weeks to finish. If you want to stay at one liner per pot, start the liner in a 4- to 4 1/2-inch pot spaced pot to pot. When the leaves reach the edge of the pot, transplant into a 6-inch pot. The total finishing time with this method is 12-14 weeks.

For 10-inch pots, start liners in 4- to 4 1/2-inch pots spaced pot to pot. When the leaves reach the edge of the pot, transplant three plants into a 10-inch pot. Finishing time is 10-12 weeks. GPN

Ryan Case is product manager for McHutchison, LLC, Ridgefield, N.J. For more information, you may contact McHutchison by phone at (800) 943-2230 or E-mail at info@mchutchison.com.