

# THE BEST

# of the Begonias

BY CHRIS BERG

*Here are a few begonia introductions from 2017 that you should be looking at right now.*

Last year was a great year for vegetative begonia introductions. Sure, we've seen a slew of breeding efforts targeted on the class since the impatiens mildew fiasco of 2013, but no other year in recent memory offered up as many attention-grabbing, stellar performing, and truly unique varieties as 2017 did. And now that that spring production is almost ready to ship out, it's the perfect time to pick some of these new lineups for the upcoming year.

These aren't just flashy new color additions to expand existing industry-standard lines. Hardly. The begonias we're talking about are true technical and aesthetic feats, plants that are defining new structures and markets within the genus. So, if you've been on the hunt for something new that's guaranteed to impress inside and out, look no further than these beautifully crafted varieties from many of the best begonia breeders in business today.

## CHLOE

When Beekenkamp releases a new elatior variety to match up to the industry-acclaimed 'Vermillion Red', it's a big deal. And the new 'Chloe' is a big deal. The Beekenkamp breeding house are experts in elatior begonias and they've brought that know-how with fully double, coral-rose flowers packed onto a plant with exceptional branching, a perfectly rounded shape and all-season garden durability. The vibrant saturation of the petal color and the elegant frilliness of the bloom, not to mention the fetching dark green foliage, make this a begonia to remember from 2017.

## RISEUP

The RiseUp series strikes a sweet chord between flower size and exceptional branching, for the most flower color possible on a hybrid begonia. A refined upright-facing flower placement gives more visual impact than traditional varieties. The color coverage on these plants is hard to look away from, and that's thanks to the lighter, mid-sized blooms

that "rise up" above the foliage. The lighter weight blooms also won't be falling off during handling of the plants at retail, as the larger flowering varieties are accustomed to. Offered in an eclectic array of colors and single and double flowering forms, RiseUp varieties are available for a wide diversity of container combination and basket programs. 'RiseUp Sansibel Peach' is pictured above.

## SHINE BRIGHT

Simply put, you can't beat the Shine Bright series from Westhoff when it comes to elegant boliviensis begonias. This series, executed in luxe white and red against a dark green foliage is what you want in a basket begonia — an abundance of flower power from tip to top without a single bare spot on the plant thanks to the best branching you've ever seen in a boliviensis begonia. The Shine Bright varieties are ridiculously easy to grow and care free for the consumer. In sun or shade, through heat and humidity, these plants will flower continuously from late spring to frost with their eye-catching cascades of elegant, elongated flowers.

'Shine Bright White' was awarded the highest score of any white begonia in the LWG Veitshoechheim independent plant breeder's trial in Germany, as well as being named the top flowering white begonia in the Mast Young Plants trial gardens in Michigan last summer.

Another noteworthy variety in the Shine Bright lineup is the Amore Red. What is so impressive about this variety is how it builds off the summer durability that boliviensis begonias are known for, but with an iconic never-before-seen upright habit and upward facing blooms, making it an enduring variety for in-ground plantings.

## SILHOUETTE

The Silhouette is a must-have series for any flowering begonia collection. Working with their network of breeders, PlantHaven International set out to reimagine the quintessential bronze leaf tuberous





## Behind the Breeding

As one of the fathers to many modern-day begonia varieties, Manfred Mehring-Lemper certainly has an eye for what the industry needs in begonia breeding. Manfred spent more than two decades with Benary in Hann. Münden Germany, where he was responsible for some well-known seed breeding lines including the Sprint and the Nightsky series of Wax-Begonia and the world-famous Big Begonias.

In 2010, Manfred made the move to lead the breeding efforts in many vegetative classes at Westhoff in Süldlohn, Germany and began the hybrid begonia program there which made its first introductions in 2017, the RiseUp and Shine Bright series. We're looking forward to seeing what he has in store for the future.

begonia, and the results are stunning. The Silhouette series is one of the most original begonia lines to have been released this year and sure to impress anyone who sees it for years to come.

Compared to the previous bronze leaf seed types on the market before, these begonias have phenomenal branching, an even, rounded habit and double the bloom count for more noticeable color. Each variety's stunningly fancy color scheme adds the perfect polish to the dark, masculine silhouetted foliage for a look that is guaranteed to stand out in the garden.

### DIBS

Rex begonias are back in a big way and no other one got us more excited about the category this year than Green Fuse Botanicals' rugged take on one of their most commanding — and refined — begonia lines. The impressively large, Dibs series, delivers vigor and height not traditionally associated with rex begonias. The Dibs series nevertheless delivers the fantastic color and patterns that we expect from a rex, but on an accelerated crop schedule with big results. Specifically geared for larger production, Dibs varieties will finish a 2.5-quart in nine to 10 weeks from transplant. Their large, crisply decorative leaf attracts attention whether in a decorative container for the patio or to brighten the area in a shady garden. The bold colored and wildly textured foliage paired with the giant landscape size is a combination that we're not used to seeing in the class, but are very glad we did this year.

### SHADOW KING

A new spin on the classics, the Shadow King series from Green Fuse Botanicals, delivers nine vibrant colors with programmable finish times and uniform habits. Gone are the days of forcing the grower to deal with multiple crop times and habits to achieve four or five color selections. With their strong basal branching habit and compact form, the Shadow King series will finish in 10 to 12 weeks from transplant. The steel gray blues, copper reds and brilliant strawberry tones, paired with the shimmering sparkle on the foliage, keep the varieties feeling fresh and exhilarating as you work your way through the series. And every grower is sure to appreciate the consistent finish times for row run shipping and diversity at the retail level. [gpn](http://gpn.com)



'Dibs Pink-White'



'Chloe'



'Shadow King Rothko'



'Shine Bright Amore Red'



'Silhouette Peach'

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