

PLUS: The best dark-leaved plants for your region ▶



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SPECIAL 20TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

Learn how to
**design with
annuals**

**3 easy recipes
for tabletop
containers**

**The right ways
to prune hollies**

**The 10 best
perennials to
start from seed**

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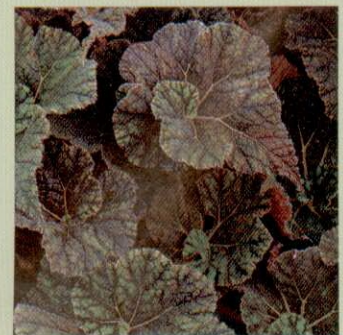
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Inspiration for hands-on living®

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REX
BEGONIAS



ON THE COVER

1. 'Sundial Mix' moss rose (*Portulaca grandiflora* 'Sundial Mix', annual)
2. Ornamental cabbage (*Brassica oleracea* cv., annual)
3. 'Castle Pink' cockscomb (*Celosia argentea* 'Castle Pink', annual)
4. 'Athena Fuchsia' pentas (*Pentas* 'Athena Fuchsia', annual)
5. 'Vista Purple' salvia (*Salvia splendens* 'Vista Purple', annual)
6. 'Wide Brim' hosta (*Hosta* 'Wide Brim', USDA Hardiness Zones 3–9)
7. 'Disco Belle Pink' rose mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos* 'Disco Belle Pink', Zones 5–10)

Designed by Julia Jones for her garden in Bay Village, Ohio

Photo by Danielle Sherry

Few plants rival these gems when it comes to hypnotic leaf colors and shapes that shine in the shade for months on end

1 Rex begonias

by Rita Randolph

As with many families, my grandmother was the horticultural inspiration behind our clan. She was the matriarch of 12 children and dozens of grandchildren and great grandchildren and the nurturer of hundreds of plants. Begonias were certainly one of her favorites. Shelves of specimens lined the large glass windows by her back porch. She cared for her begonia collection in little clay pots but also grew cuttings or divisions in tin cans until they were ready to be shared with friends and relatives. Perhaps begonias are in our blood; I, too, have had a lifelong enchantment with this group of exotic plants.

Among my favorites, and the most coveted, are Rex begonias (*Begonia Rex-cultorum* group). Their fabulous foliage offers a large range of colors, shapes, and textures. The flowers are insignificant, but with leaves like these, who cares? Rex begonias headline the show for months on end in any shade garden, especially when grown in containers. These plants prefer shaded, humid conditions and rich, aerated soil like that found on the forest floor. Too much water and fertilizer is the kiss of death for Rex begonias. Soggy soil and prolonged wet leaves and stems can lead to rot, while highly concentrated fertilizer will burn the foliage. If you keep these points in mind when caring for your plants, it will be smooth sailing.

With all the breeding that has gone on with Rex begonias, it's hard not to find one that strikes your fancy, especially as more and more selections are being introduced with a wide range of colors and intriguing veining and puckering in the leaves. The leaf sizes vary but grow up to 9 inches long and 5 inches wide, while the mounding habit of the plants generally reaches

'Fireworks'

The strong dark black, metallic silver, and vivid purple coloration of 'Fireworks' makes it one of the most striking and popular of the new cultivars available. Choosing companion plants that echo these rich colors results in an eye-catching combination.

GOOD BEDFELLOWS

1. **Silver dichondra**
(*Dichondra argentea* 'Silver Falls', USDA Hardiness Zones 10–11)
2. **Black mondo grass**
(*Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens', Z 6–11)
3. **Summer Wave® Blue wishbone flower**
(*Torenia* 'SUNrenilabu', Z 10–11)



12 to 18 inches tall and wide—the perfect proportions to create gorgeous and dramatic planting combinations with perennials, annuals, or other tropical beauties. Use Rex begonias as the heart of vignettes, playing off their intricate colors and details. I think you'll find it won't be long before the love of begonias is in your blood, too. These seven are a diverse mix of some of my favorites.

Rita Randolph is the second-generation owner of Randolph's Greenhouses in Jackson, Tennessee.



Who needs flowers? The bold leaves of 'Fireworks' begonia steal the show and mingle beautifully with other foliage plants, like Japanese painted fern (*Athyrium niponicum*, Zones 5-8), creeping wire vine (*Muehlenbeckia axillaris*, Z 8-10), and 'Frosted Curls' sedge (*Carex comans* 'Frosted Curls', Z 7-9).