Stop 360 Adult Tour – Warm Temperate House Overview

With its diverse collections of citrus, gesneriads, and begonias, the Warm Temperate House offers a look at some of the tropical and subtropical plants that can be successfully grown as houseplants with a moderate amount of care. In this greenhouse the Botanic Garden really emphasizes the ornamental nature of the plants, and the specimens here are used frequently by Smith’s Horticulture classes.

The south side of the center bench highlights one of the Botanic garden’s best collections – begonias. These plants were named for botanist Michael Begon during the 17th century. Generations of begonia breeding have produced thousands of varieties featuring a vast assortment of colorful flowers and foliage to please any gardener. The most familiar species of begonias have long been popular as annual bedding and potted greenhouse plants, but there are also types that can trail just like a vine or grow in a shrub-like fashion. Another species that we have in our collection has bamboo-like stems that are topped by flared silver-spotted leaves, which are split almost in two. Many a begonia-loving Grandmother called them, her “Angel Wing” begonias.

One of the most widely grown begonias has a rounded waxy-looking leaf that usually comes in green or bronze, but as Conservatory Manager Rob Nicholson points out, that’s just the tip of the iceberg when you’re talking about begonia plants. Rob: “If people look at the collection they can see that there’s some begonias that have very, very small leaves and others that have leaves that are 18 inches across. There’s a wide-variety within the family in terms of leaf shape, whether the leaves are mottled, speckled, different colors – so they’re a spectacular houseplant because of the beautiful leaf form, leaf color, leaf texture. And some of them also have wonderfully colored flowers, be they orange or pink or crimson, so it’s really one of the better plant families for growing indoors.”