



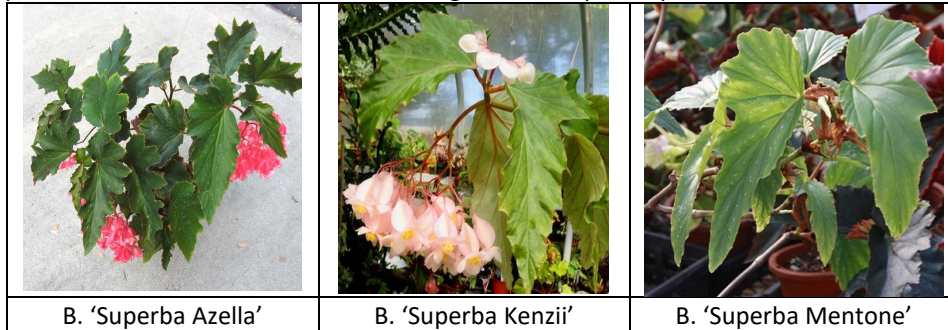
Superba Cane-like Begonias

The American Begonia Society

I get so confused: Superba-type cane begonias.

OK so a “Superba” type cane is another of these weird distinctions we come up with to account for plants that show certain traits. The “Superba type” are cane-like begonias, but they look different than other cane-like begonias, I guess.

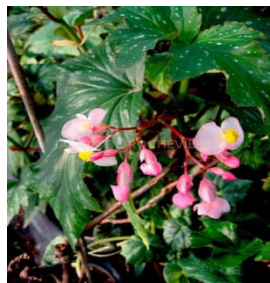
Eva Kenworthy Gray in 1925. When Eva made the cross (B. aconitifolia × B. ‘Lucerna’) coined the term ‘superba’. B. aconitifolia genetics gave the leaves large, jagged lobes, or fingers, and silvery splashes, the red leaf undersides of B. ‘Lucerna’ shaded the foliage with red to purple tones. Eva named each of her seedlings with a ‘Superba’ prefix – and that started the whole superba craze.



Belva Kusler (1959) used B. aconitifolia (then called B. sceptrum, but it is just a form of B. aconitifolia) and crossed it with B. ‘Lenore Olivier’ which was black/dark leaved more traditional cane-like begonia. ALL of these show up in the breeding of later hybridizers.



B. ‘Sophie Cecile’ is probably the best known “Superba” type, among gardeners.



Irene Nuss (1961) and **Margaret & Peter Lee** (1965) (B. ‘Elizabeth Lockhart’ x B. aconitifolia) to get B. ‘Kentwood’, and Lee - (B. ‘Elizabeth Lockhart’ x unknown) to get B. ‘Lana’. The Lee’s hit a home run with B. ‘Lana’ which could be the most loved “Superba” type by Begonia growers.

B. ‘Kentwood’



B. ‘Lana’

Irene went on to use her seedlings to build a whole program of “Superba” breeding, which she saw as the best California landscape Begonia, vigorous and trouble free. B. ‘Irene Nuss’ remains one of her top creations coming closest to her ideal; with huge flowers, excellent growth and performance, and trouble free growing.



B. ‘Irene Nuss’

In 1976, **Hazel Burly** in Australia also began to work in “Superba” types and went back to basics using B. aconitifolia, B. ‘Corallina de Lucerna’, B. ‘Elizabeth Lockhart’ and B. ‘Lenore Olivier’ to make some well know hybrids.

Walter Dworkin (1991) in New York was also making “Superba” types, as a small part of his overall hybridizing program which is very diversified. Walter, in his “Superba” type crosses seems to have relied on hybrid × hybrid crosses using top performers of the time such as Irene Nuss’s B. ‘Kentwood’, B. ‘Silvermist’, B. ‘Dumbo’ and Lee’s B. ‘Lana’. His plants walk the line between a cane-like and a “Superba” type, less lobing, thick waxy leaf textures, which gives them a more refined look. Walter is still hybridizing and active in ABS in 2023.

Paul P. Lowe (1990), breeding in Florida, starting making crosses and using *B. aconitifolia* again, so he released some “Superba” types similar to Eva Gray’s original crosses. Paul did not classify any of his breeding as “Superba” types, Mary Bucholz referred to them this way in her Jul/Aug 1992 articles highlighting Paul’s breeding in *The Begonian*.

Brad Thompson began breeding superba types in 1992. A quick check of the International Database of Begonias shows that Brad introduced over 58 hybrids in this class. Brad was a friend and admirer of Irene Nuss and her hybrids, Brad also admitted he was trying to continue Irene’s goals. As a result most of this breeding bears a very strong resemblance to Irene Nuss’s work.



Around 1999-2000 **Freda Holley**, noted for her work in interspecific crosses as well as hybrid crosses, began doing some crosses with *B. aconitifolia*, *B. platanifolia* and *B. 'Nora Hanson'* and others. She created *B. 'Caliph'*, *B. 'Taylor Anne'*, *B. 'Satchmo'*, and *B. Willow'*.

B. 'Willow'

DEFINITION ACCORDING TO:

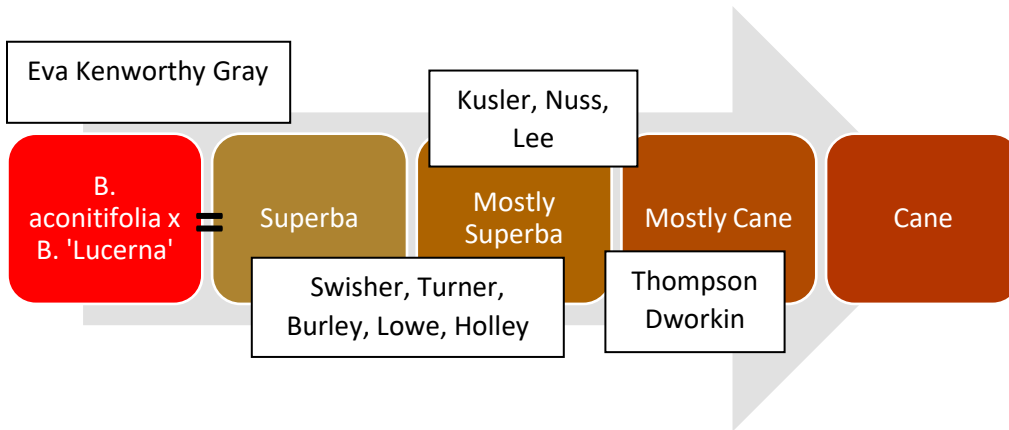
OK so what is a “Superba”?

They have the heritage of *B. aconitifolia* OR *B. platanifolia* (or *B. leathermaniae* as it was also known) AND cleft leaves. The leaves are silver splashed.

But none of these definitions even mention the other half of the “Superba” genetics, the primary hybrid *B. 'Lucerna'* or *B. 'Corallina de Lucerna'*. Here is the plant that added the red tone to the foliage, the color to the flowers, and a big chunk of the easy to grow qualities that are all ascribed to “Superba” types.

So, in truth it is a moving definition, what Eva Gray created is not the “Superba” types that Irene, Margaret & Peter, Brad, and Walter created. And what about all the cane-like Begonias that have the qualities described but are not considered “Superba” types? Why is *B. 'Looking Glass'* not a “Superba” type?

It’s like this:



I am not a cane growing Begonian, but for me, just leave the term “Superba” back where it belongs with Eva Kenworthy Gray and her cross in 1924. The traits that are left in their ongoing description are all strongly affected by light and temperature and maturity, so your plant may or may not even show those qualities depending on how you grow it.

The term “Superba” does not mean anything beyond that, they are not ALL stronger, better, easier, free flowering, or really any more alike than any other cane begonias. So why not just call them that? A cane-like begonia with notched leaf margins, red leaf undersides, silver spotting or marking.

