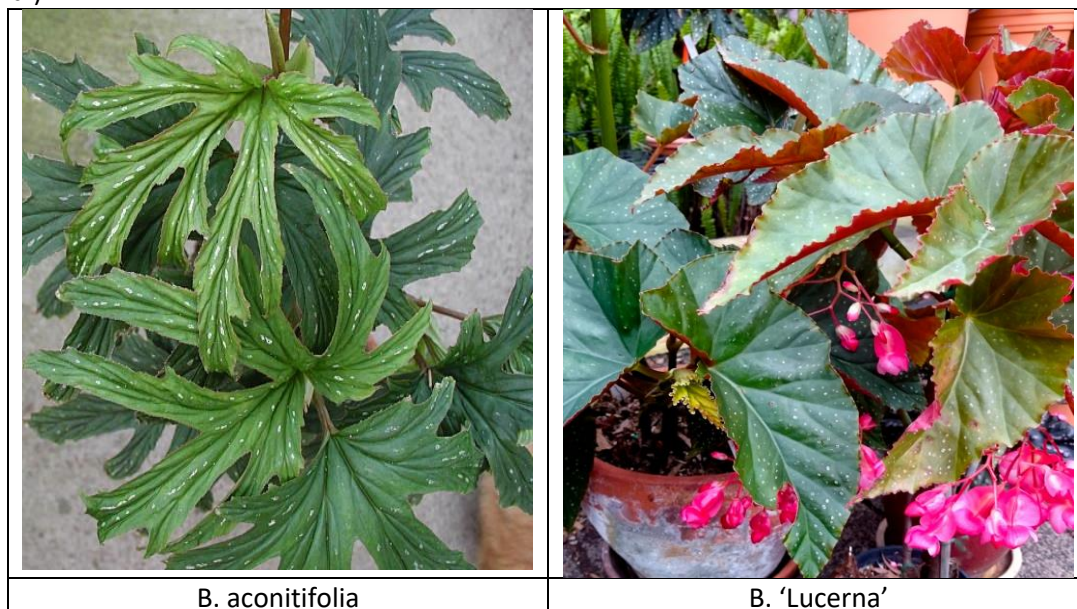


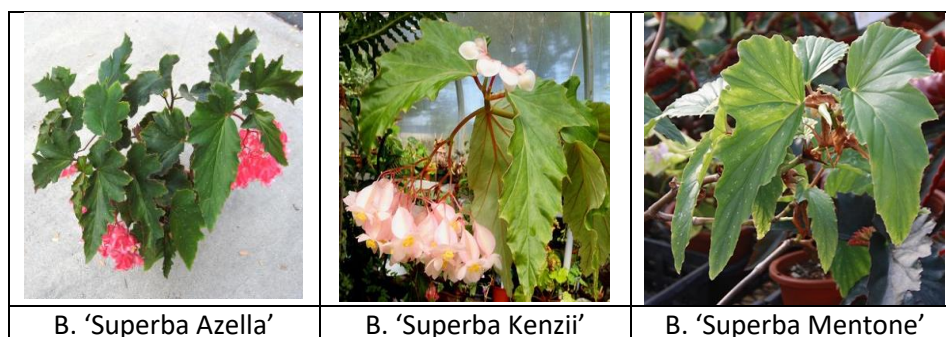
I get so confused: Superba-type cane begonias.

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.

The whole thing started with Eva Kenworthy Gray in 1925. When Eva made the cross (*B. aconitifolia* × *B. ‘Lucerna’*)



and named all the seedlings with the prefix “Superba”. In essence she was naming the cross itself (also known as the grex). The high level of *B. aconitifolia* genetics gave the leaves large, jagged lobes, or fingers, and the red leaf undersides of *B. ‘Lucerna’* shaded the foliage with red to purple tones.



From here the madness began as everyone was very excited by how different the plants looked and started calling anything with lobed, red toned foliage a “Superba” type. The more people hybridized with these plants and their parents the wider the range of traits became, the more the lines blurred. Then later hybridizers needed to go back and name earlier hybrids as “Superba” type, everyone wants to grow those new “Superba” types, so people start to call this plant or that plant a “Superba because it sells better. Soon the species *B. aconitifolia* (1965) itself is referred to as “Superba” type, then *B.*

lubbersii (1970) then *B. platanifolia* (1980) is suddenly “Superba”, and then *B. leathermaniae* (1994). How do species suddenly end up being a hybrid “type”? Argh, why do we do this?

FOOTPRINTS IN THE GENETIC SANDS

So, Eva Gray (1925) started the ball rolling, but very few seedlings of her hybrids ever went anywhere. Only Elva Swisher (1935) used *B. ‘Superba Kenzii’* and *B. aconitifolia* but again no one bred with her hybrids, so they seem to have disappeared. Marie Turner (1957) however, created (*B. unknown superba* type x *B. unknown*) *B. ‘Elizabeth Lockhart’* which was used in the breeding of many hybridizers afterwards. Sadly, there are no pictures for it.

ENTER LENORE OLIVIER

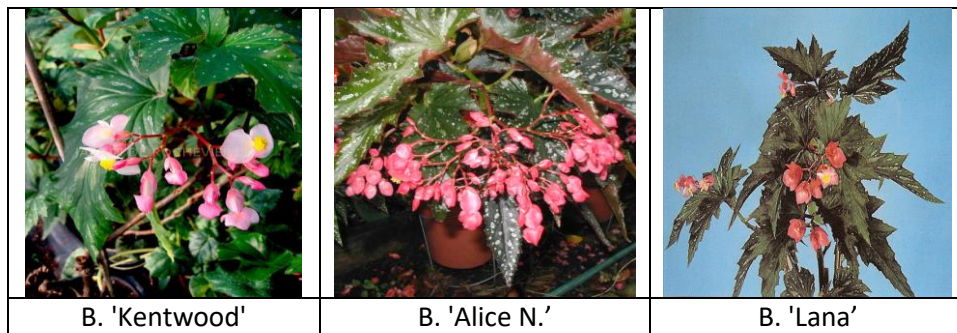
Belva Kusler (1959) got serious about this type. Belva’s take on this cross was to use *B. aconitifolia* (then called *B. sceptrum*, but it is just a form of *B. aconitifolia*) and cross it with *B. ‘Lenore Olivier’* which was black/dark leaved more traditional cane-like begonia, so no lobed leaves, no silver spotting, but with red undersides on the foliage. But what she did get were some very nice hybrids with lobed, serrated leaves, sometimes with silver markings and the purple red tones. ALL of these show up in the breeding of later hybridizers.













B. 'Sophie Cecile' is probably the best known “Superba” type in the world, among non-begonia enthusiasts. It is tall, thin, and as they say a shy bloomer, but tough and fast growing, so most people succeed with it and it grows so easily they feel like a winner with their plant.

BRINGING UP THE FLOWER NUMBERS, DRIFTING TO CANE-LIKE

Irene Nuss (1961) and Margaret & Peter Lee (1965) used Marie Turner’s *B. ‘Elizabeth Lockhart’* to create: Nuss - (*B. ‘Elizabeth Lockhart’* x *B. aconitifolia*) to get *B. ‘Kentwood’*, and *B. ‘Alice N.’* and Lee - (*B. ‘Elizabeth Lockhart’* x unknown) to get *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. Her later breeding continued to keep the large size and more reddish tones, but focusing on strong growers. B. ‘Kentwood’ was a favorite parent in her crossing. Though she would later incorporate B. lubbersii in her crosses, she did not go back to B. aconitifolia. It is quite a list of great hybrids:

				
B. 'Hannah Serr'	B. 'Irene Nuss'	B. 'Kent Brandon'	B. 'Jumbo Jet'	B. 'Peaches 'n Cream'
				
B. 'Silvermist'	B. 'Pink Jade'	B. 'Kenillu'	B. 'Symphony'	B. 'Skylark'

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.

The Lee’s hit a home run with B. ‘Lana’ which could be the most loved “Superba” type by Begonia growers. At least it runs neck and neck with the breeding of Irene Nuss. The Lee’s used B. ‘Lana’ as a parent and while all these were nice seedlings, it was B. ‘Nokomis’ that got the most attention.

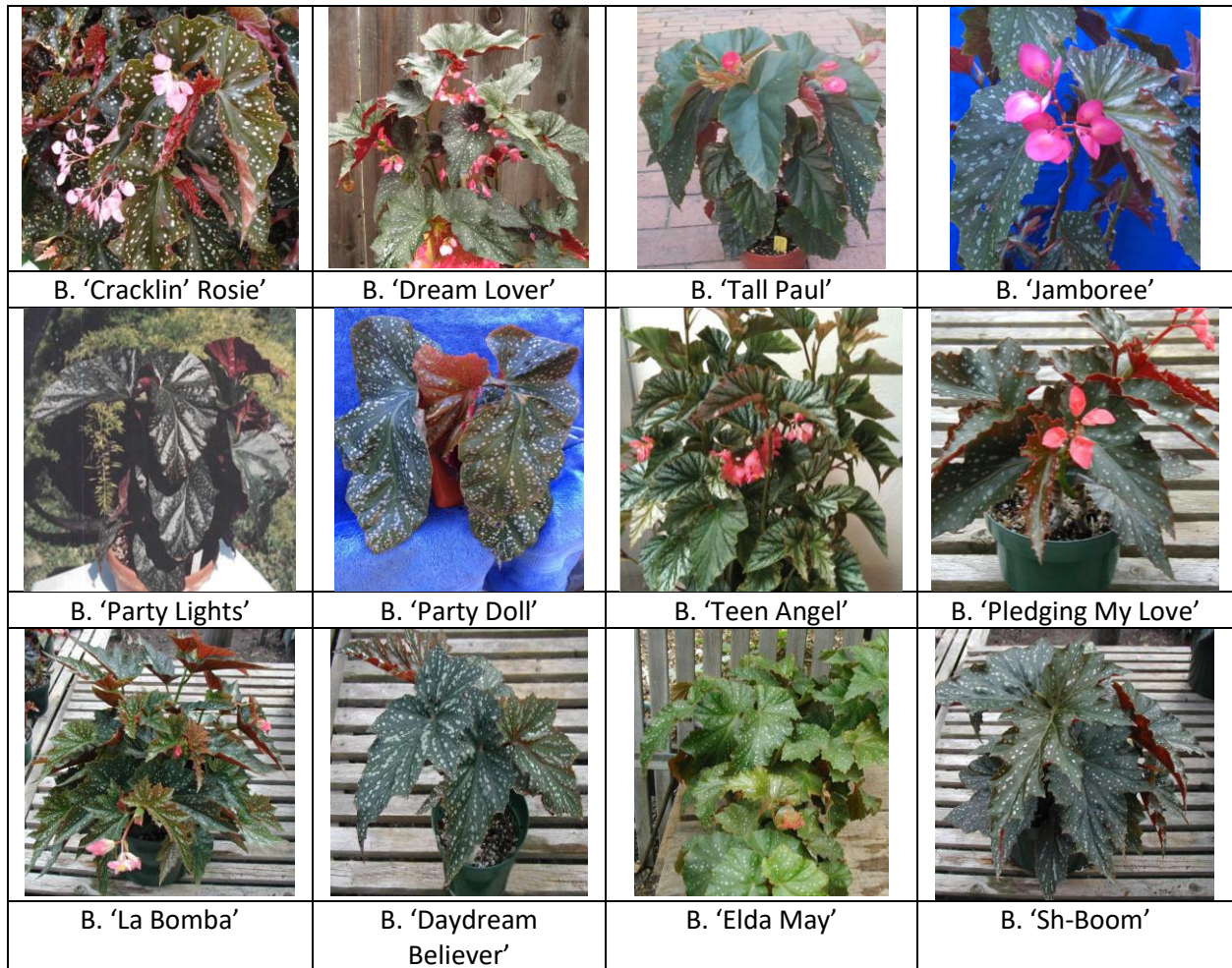
			
'Kristy' - dark foliage, reddish back	B. 'Nokomis' was green with strong silvering.	'Osota' was more like 'Lana'	'Yahoo'

Also, and maybe most importantly, these crosses by Nuss and Lee incorporating other hybrids took the shy flowering B. aconitifolia genetics and gave seedlings with a much high bloom number. While at the same time, all the newer cultivars were sliding back to triangular leaf shapes, little lobing, losing their spots and original species characteristics, becoming more and more simply cane like again.

At this point in time 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. But this was very definitely an adaptation of Belva Kusler’s original concept. *B. ‘Christina Grace’* seems to have been her most popular hybrid.








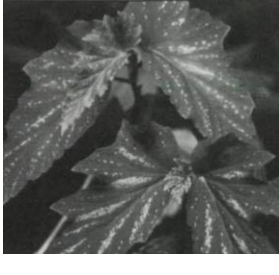
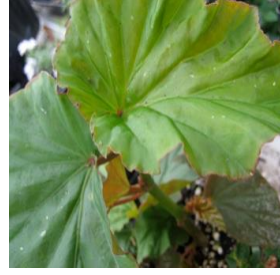

Walter Dworkin (1991) in New York was also making “Superba” types, as a small part of his overall hybridizing program which is very diversified.



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’*.

Also Walter took *B. maculata* and began mixing it into his hybrids, which was a beautiful addition, *B. maculata* brought heavy, large silver spotting to the foreground and smoothed some the rougher “Superba” type characteristics. 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.

At this point in time 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 also brought *Symbegonia sanguinea* into the mix. However, 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*.

			
B. ‘Adam Kennaway’	B. ‘Debbie Kennaway’	B. ‘Naomi Lynch’	B. ‘Norm Kennaway’
			
B. ‘Greg Ostaffe’	B. ‘Ralph Nelson’	B. ‘Phil Ormes’	B. ‘Peter Riccobono’









THEN CAME BRAD

There is no getting around the impact on Begonias that was Brad Thompson. He may have fans and detractors amongst Begonians but you cannot deny he was a hurricane of ideas and plants that changed much of the Begonia world for the better. As with everything Brad seems to have done, when he applied himself to breeding “Superba” begonias, he really applied himself. A quick check of the International Database of Begonias shows that Brad introduced over 58 hybrids in this class, some do not appear to match the superba definition, others do but are simply called cane-like, why?









Brad was a friend and admirer of Irene Nuss and her hybrids, Brad also admitted he was trying to continue Irene’s goals in plant vigor, shape and durability, so he relied heavily on her hybrids to make up his own next gen “Superbas”. He unashamedly admitted he released too many similar seedlings, but he was hybridizing to introduce new flower colors so his focus shifted “Superba” type hybrids into yet another area.

Initially (1992) Brad focused on using Irene Nuss’s *B. ‘Jumbo Jet’* as a parent and one of his most successful crosses was (*B. ‘Jumbo Jet’* x *B. ‘Sophie Cecile’*)* which gave sixteen released hybrids. *B. ‘Jumbo Jet’* also was involved in another ten hybrids, usually as the pod parent. As a result most of this breeding bears a very strong resemblance to Irene Nuss’s work, while there might be some changes in

color, and texture, but in essence all are quite similar. More jagged edges than much of Walter Dworkin's selections, so stylistically Brad's work is closer to Irene's.

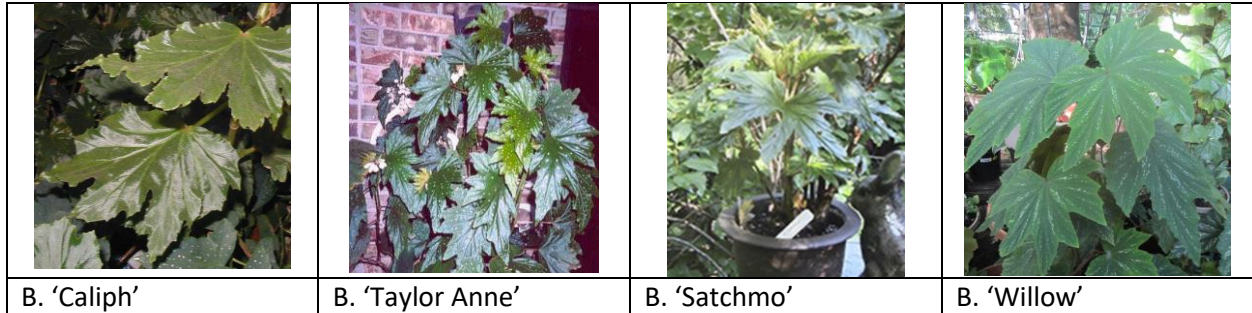
			
B. 'Jeanne Jones'*	B. 'Miss Kitty'*	B. 'Daniel Thompson'*	B. 'Bolero'*
			
B. 'Patriot Games'*1	B. 'Black Gold'	B. 'Don Case'	B. 'Little Miss Mummey'

Another very successful cross for Brad was (1996) (B. 'Lana' × B. 'Lady Molina') which gave eight hybrids of which B. 'Lady Hoskins' and B. 'Arlene Ingles' are pictured below and the cross (B. 'Alice N.' × B. 'Phantom Menace') which gave six hybrids. B. 'Andromeda', B. 'Red Rocket', B. 'Gray Skys', B. 'Miss Marianne', B. 'Black Pearls', B. 'Summerland Spectacular'. Brad also released many hybrids in the category with B. 'Lana' as a parent.

			
B. 'Lady Hoskins'	B. 'Arlene Ingles'	B. 'Andromeda'	B. 'Miss Marianne'
			
B. 'Summerland Spectacular'	B. 'Lady Iris Bird'	B. 'Lomita Lady'	B. 'Dotty Miller'

¹ * - these images are all from the Brad Thompson cross (B. 'Jumbo Jet' x B. 'Sophie Cecile'), all the images in the table share B. 'Jumbo Jet' as parent.

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'*.



DEFINITION ACCORDING TO:

OK so what is a "Superba"? Because we really need another big ugly mess of Begonia characteristics to fight over for the next 50 years.

According to Millie & Ed Thompson - The Superba type has leaves which are either lobed or cleft with undulate margins. The leaves are silver splashed. Mike Kartuz (Mar/Apr 1993) wrote in the Begonian *B. aconitifolia*, introduced in Europe in 1892, is important in the development of the Superba types by hybridizer Eva Kenworthy Gray. Another species used in the creation of Superba types is *B. sceptrum*, introduced in England in 1884. Superba types are characterized by palmately lobed leaves often splashed with silver. In the Begonian Jul/Aug 2010 Brad Thompson says: They all share the feature of having large, lobed or deeply cleft leaves, on large growing plants. They were totally different than previous canes of the time so were separated out as a new type.

Brad Thompson had very definite opinions on how and what made a "Superba". In Jul/Aug 2010 Begonian Brad Thompson says and repeats this again in Brad's Begonia World: They all share the feature of having large, lobed or deeply cleft leaves, on large growing plants. They were totally different than previous canes of the time so were separated out as a new type. He adds that they have to have both the heritage of *B. aconitifolia* OR *B. platanifolia* (or *B. leathermaniae* as it was also known) AND cleft leaves.

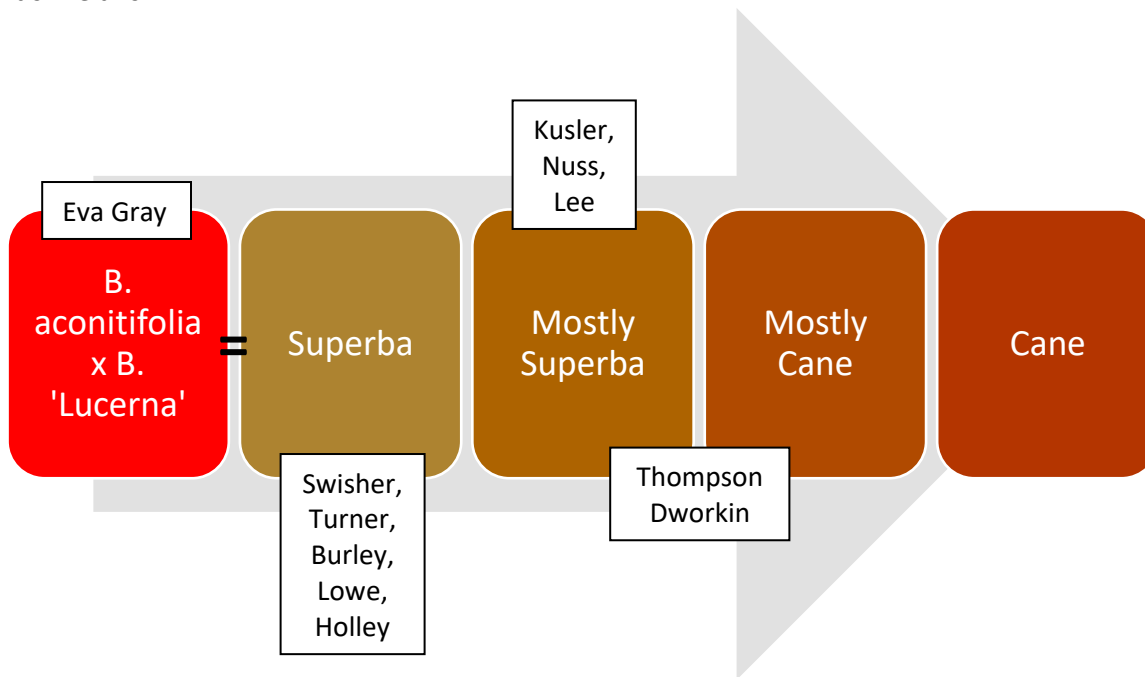
But none of these definitions even mention the other half of the "Superba" genetics, the primary hybrid *B. 'Lucerna'* or *B. 'Corallina de Lucerna'*. Here's is the plant that added the red tone to the foliage, the color to the flowers, and a big chunk of the easy to grow qualities that are all ascribed to "Superba" types. In truth we can only hope that Eva is recorded correctly as to which parent was pod parent and which was pollen parent, because we don't actually know.

And somewhere along the line, the size of "Superba" types gets dropped off the definition, in fact as early as 1987 Patrick Worley showed a plant only named *B. 'mini-superba#82787'*, and 2000 Doug Pridgen introduced *B. 'Miniperba'*, and along the way lots of folks crossed superba types with *B. dregei* since it makes anything a dwarf...chuckle. But no one promotes small "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. Like the term “Mallet” type, is constantly shifting, becoming outdated, yet never disposed of so it remains to confuse us all.

And what about all the cane-like Begonias that do have the qualities described but are not considered “Superba” types? Why is B. ‘Looking Glass’ not a “Superba” type? (Heck, for that matter why isn’t that plant in the “Begonia Hall of Fame”? Patrick Worley crossed (B. (Lana x Orpha C. Fox) × B. (Hannah Serr x Mandarin)) to create this gorgeous plant, that’s ¾ “Superba” type genetics and it is 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.



Now don’t get me started on “Mallet” types!