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Begonias of India: the Begonia Group and the New Arunachal Species

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Begonias of India: the Begonia Group and the New Arunachal Species

Some plants are famous for one species. Others are famous for sheer numbers. Begonias belong to the second kind. There are more than 2,000 of them. On 5 August 2026, scientists published the description of one more, from a river valley in Arunachal Pradesh. This lesson explains the whole begonia group, using the new plant as our guide.

Begonias, at a glance

Four facts that clear up most exam questions

01
Begonia neelamorum

New species from Keyi Panyor district, Arunachal Pradesh.

02
About 2,200

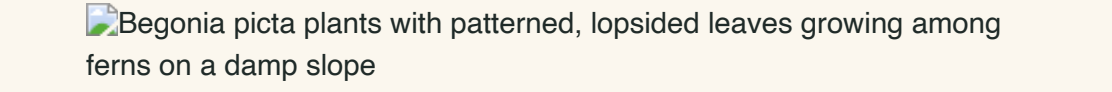
Known species of begonia around the world.

03
Monoecious

Male and female flowers grow on one plant.

04
Data Deficient

Its first IUCN status, as too little is known yet.



Begonia picta, the painted leaf begonia, grows wild in the Himalaya. Note the lopsided leaf. Photo: 黃建益, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Genus A group of closely related species. Begonia is one genus.
Endemic Found in one place and nowhere else on Earth.
Tuber A swollen underground stem that stores food, like a potato.
Monoecious Separate male and female flowers on the same plant.

What was found in Arunachal?

Current Affairs

On 5 August 2026, a team of Indian botanists published the description of a new plant: **Begonia neelamorum**. They found it in **Keyi Panyor district** of Arunachal Pradesh (The Hindu).

- It grows on **steep, wet rock walls** along the Keyi River.
- That spot is about **1,000 m** above sea level.
- The plant is tiny, only about **10 to 12 cm** tall.
- It has a **single leaf**, light green and covered in small hairs.
- It grows from a **tuber** and carries small **white flowers**.

Who found it?

- The team was led by **Dipankar Borah** of Kaliabor College in Assam.
- Scientists from Sikkim University and an Arunachal college also helped.
- The study came out in **Taiwania**, a plant science journal.

Where does the name come from?

- It honours the **Neelam clan** of the **Nyishi** people.

- The Nyishi are the main community of Keyi Panyor.
- Keyi Panyor became a district in **2024**. It was carved out of Lower Subansiri.

How is it different?

- Its closest cousin is **Begonia prolifera**.
- But the new plant has egg-shaped leaves with double-toothed edges.
- Its flower parts are also shaped a little differently.
- It is the **54th begonia species** known from Northeast India.

> **Quick check 1.** Q1. True or False: Begonia neelamorum was found in the Western Ghats of Kerala. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What is a begonia?

Must Know

Begonia is a **genus** of flowering plants. Most begonias live for many years. They love warm, wet and shady places (Wikipedia).

- Wild begonias grow in **Asia, Africa, and Central and South America**.
- Many are kept as **houseplants**, for their bright flowers and pretty leaves.
- Their leaves are often **lopsided**. One half of the leaf is bigger than the other.
- The showy parts of the flower are petal-like **tepals**. Sepals and petals are usually not clearly different in begonias. Sepals are the small green parts under the petals in most other flowers.

Who named the genus?

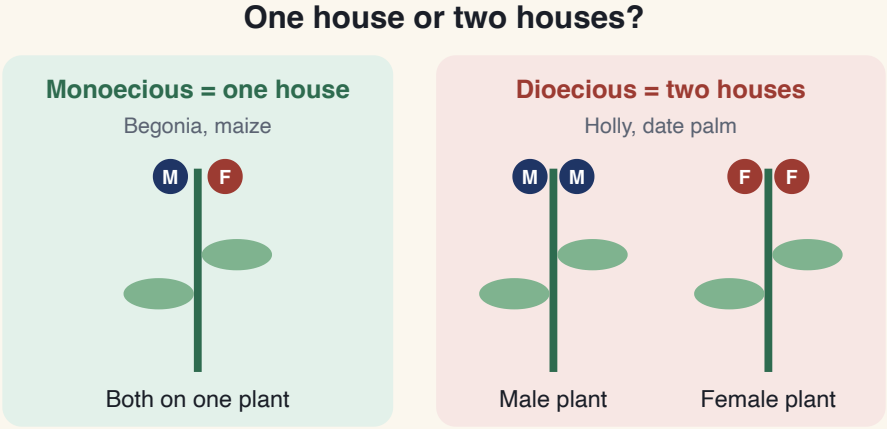
- A French botanist, **Charles Plumier**, coined it.
- He named it after **Michel Bégon**, a governor of a French colony that is now Haiti.
- Carl Linnaeus took up the name in **1753**.

> **Quick check 2.** Q2. True or False: Begonia leaves are often lopsided, with one half bigger than the other. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How do begonia flowers work?

Must Know

A begonia flower is either **male** or **female**. It is never both. But one plant carries both kinds. Botanists call this **monoecious**.



Begonias are monoecious. Each plant has its own male and female flowers.

- **Monoecious** comes from Greek words for “one house”. Both kinds of flower share one plant.
- **Maize** works the same way. Its male flowers sit in the tassel at the top. Its female flowers form the cob.
- **Dioecious** means “two houses”. Some plants are only male. Others are only female.
- **Holly** and **date palm** are dioecious.

Do not mix these up

- A **bisexual** flower has male and female parts inside the same flower. A rose or hibiscus flower is like this.
- A **monoecious** plant has two separate kinds of flower on one plant.
- So a begonia plant is monoecious. But each of its flowers is **unisexual**.

The new Arunachal begonia fits the pattern. It carries **white male and female flowers** at the tip of its stem.

Quick check 3. Q3. True or False: A monoecious plant has male flowers on one plant and female flowers on another plant. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Think it through, before reading on. Why might it help a plant to keep its male and female flowers apart, even on the same plant?

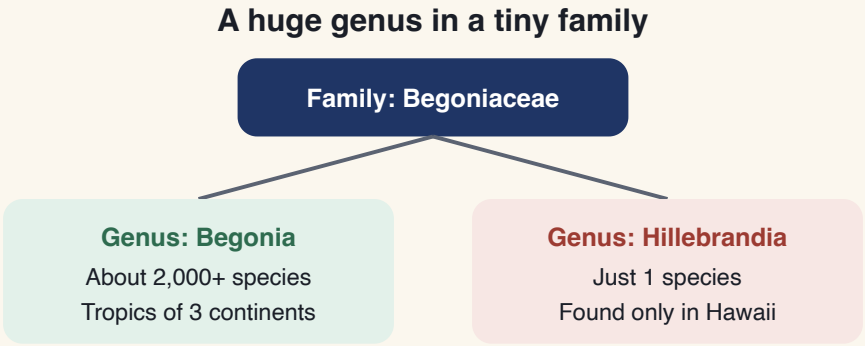
Show the explanation

If male and female parts sit in one flower, the flower can easily fertilise itself. That gives seeds with less variety. Separate flowers make it more likely that pollen comes from another plant. Insects carry it across. Seeds then mix traits from two parents. This variety helps a species survive change over time.

How big is the family?

Good to Know

Begonia is one of the **largest genera** of flowering plants. It has about **2,200** known species. New ones are found almost every year (The Hindu).



Almost every plant in the family is a begonia.

- Begonias belong to the family **Begoniaceae**.
- This family has just **two genera** (Wikipedia).
- The other genus is **Hillebrandia**. It has only one species, found only in **Hawaii**.
- So almost every plant in the family is a begonia.

Why so many species?

- Many begonias grow only in **small, cut-off patches**, like one wet cliff or one valley.
- Groups kept apart for a long time slowly change in different ways.
- Over time they become new species. That is why so many begonias are **endemic**.
- Even the same issue of Taiwania named two more new begonias. One was from the **Philippines** and one from **Sulawesi** in Indonesia.

> **Quick check 4.** Q4. True or False: The family Begoniaceae has only two genera, Begonia and Hillebrandia. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What does Data Deficient mean?

Must Know

The new begonia was given a first status of **Data Deficient**. This is a category on the **IUCN Red List** (Wikipedia).

- It means there is **too little information** to judge how close a species is to dying out.
- It does **not** mean the species is safe.
- It also does not mean the species is in danger. We simply do not know yet.

Why this begonia is a worry

- It is known from **one spot** of about **3 sq km**.
- A single landslide or road could wipe out that whole patch.
- More surveys are needed before it can get a firm status.

> **Quick check 5.** Q5. True or False: A Data Deficient species is one that the IUCN has found to be safe from extinction. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Why is the Northeast rich?

Good to Know

Northeast India is one of the richest places for plants in the world. It falls in two **biodiversity hotspots**: the **Himalaya** and **Indo-Burma** (Wikipedia).

- A hotspot must have at least **1,500** plant species found nowhere else.
- It must also have lost at least **70%** of its natural plant cover.

- So a hotspot is both **very rich** and **under threat**.
- The world has **36** such hotspots.

What makes the Northeast so rich?

- It gets heavy rain and stays damp for much of the year.
- Steep hills and deep valleys cut the land into many small, cut-off patches.
- Height changes quickly, from warm valleys to cold peaks.
- That is exactly the kind of place begonias love. Orchids thrive here too.

> **Quick check 6.** Q6. True or False: Northeast India lies in both the Himalaya and the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspots. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Remember this: Begonia neelamorum is a new species from Keyi Panyor district, Arunachal Pradesh (2026). It is named after the Neelam clan of the Nyishi. It is the 54th begonia of Northeast India, with status Data Deficient. Begonia has about 2,200 species. Its family, Begoniaceae, has two genera: Begonia and Hillebrandia of Hawaii. Begonias and maize are monoecious; holly and date palm are dioecious. A hotspot needs 1,500 endemic plants and 70% habitat lost. There are 36 worldwide.

Exam Angle

How have exams tested this?

Quick Q&A

In which district was Begonia neelamorum found?

Keyi Panyor, in Arunachal Pradesh.

Which tribe’s clan gave the plant its name?

The Neelam clan of the Nyishi people.

Name a crop that is monoecious, like begonia.

Maize.

Where is Hillebrandia found?

Only in Hawaii.

Which two hotspots cover Northeast India?

The Himalaya and Indo-Burma.

Related Topics

Rhynchostylis retusa: the Foxtail Orchid

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MCQ on Begonias and Plant Groups

5 verified questions from this lesson.

More questions on new species, plant biology and the Northeast:

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Practice MCQs

1. Consider the following statements about Begonia neelamorum, described in 2026:

1. It was found in Keyi Panyor district of Arunachal Pradesh.

2. It is named after a clan of the Adi tribe.

3. It has been provisionally assessed as Data Deficient under IUCN criteria.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

See answer ↓

2. A plant that bears separate male and female flowers on the same plant, as in begonia and maize, is called:

A. Bisexual

B. Parthenocarpic

C. Dioecious

D. Monoecious

See answer ↓

3. The plant family Begoniaceae has only two genera. Apart from Begonia, the other genus, Hillebrandia, is found only in:

A. Sri Lanka

B. New Zealand

C. Hawaii

D. Madagascar

See answer ↓

4. Assertion (A): A species listed as Data Deficient by the IUCN is considered safe from extinction. Reason (R): The Data Deficient category is used when there is too little information to assess a species' extinction risk.

A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A

B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A

C. A is true, but R is false

D. A is false, but R is true

See answer ↓

5. Under the criteria set by Norman Myers, a region qualifies as a biodiversity hotspot if it has at least how many endemic vascular plant species and has lost at least 70% of its primary vegetation?

A. 500

B. 1,500

C. 2,500

D. 1,000

See answer ↓

6. Begonia neelamorum, a new plant species described in 2026, was found in which state?

A. Meghalaya

B. Sikkim

C. Kerala

D. Arunachal Pradesh

See answer ↓

7. The Nyishi tribe, one of India's largest tribal communities by population, is found mainly in?

A. Kashmir Valley

B. Arunachal Pradesh

C. Andaman and Nicobar Islands

D. Kerala's Nilgiri region

See answer ↓

8. Which of the following statements best defines the monoecious? (SSC CGL 2024, Tier-I, General Awareness, 09 Sep Shift 1, Q23)

A. A flower with both androecium and gynoecium

B. A flower with dithecous

C. A flower with gynoecium only

D. A flower with androecium only

See answer ↓

9. How many new species of the lichen genus Allographa were described from the Western Ghats in 2026?

A. 3

B. 10

C. 5

D. 8

See answer ↓

10. Gegeneophis chandgadi, described from Maharashtra in 2026, is a new species of:

A. Freshwater crab

B. Caecilian (legless amphibian)

C. Lizard

D. Frog

See answer ↓

11. Consider the following statements about Rhynchostylis retusa:

1. It is a monopodial epiphyte.

2. It is listed under CITES Appendix

I.

3. It is the state flower of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 and 3 only

B. 1 and 2 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

See answer ↓

12. Which plant family does Rhynchostylis retusa (Foxtail orchid) belong to?

A. Fabaceae

B. Poaceae

C. Orchidaceae

D. Liliaceae

See answer ↓

13. Angiosperms are also known by which alternative name?

A. Seedless plants

B. Flowering plants

C. Fruitless plants

D. Vascular cryptogams

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** Statements 1 and 3 are correct. The plant was found along the Keyi River in Keyi Panyor district. It is named after the Neelam clan of the Nyishi people, not the Adi. It is known from one small site, so it is provisionally Data Deficient. ↑ Q1
2. **D.** Monoecious means 'one household'. Male and female flowers are separate but grow on the same plant. Dioecious plants, like holly and date palm, carry only one kind of flower on each plant. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** Hillebrandia has a single species, found only in Hawaii. Almost every other plant in the family is a begonia, with about 2,000 or more species. ↑ Q3
4. **D.** A is false. Data Deficient does not mean safe. R is true. The category only says there is not enough information to judge the risk. The species may later prove to be threatened. ↑ Q4
5. **B.** A hotspot needs at least 1,500 endemic vascular plant species. It must also have lost at least 70% of its primary vegetation. Northeast India falls in the Himalaya and Indo-Burma hotspots. ↑ Q5
6. **D.** It was found in Keyi Panyor district, Arunachal Pradesh. It is the 54th Begonia species from Northeast India. ↑ Q6
7. **B.** The Nyishi are found mainly in Arunachal Pradesh. The Nature Conservation Foundation calls them the dominant tribe around Pakke. Down To Earth calls them the largest tribal group in Arunachal. ↑ Q7
8. **A.** "Monoecious" means having both male and female reproductive organs on the same plant, and a flower with both androecium (male) and gynoecium (female) parts is considered monoecious. ↑ Q8
9. **C.** The correct answer is **5**. Researchers described five new species of the lichen-forming fungus genus Allographa from the Western Ghats in 2026, reports All India Radio News. Devdiscourse gives the same count. The '3' option is wrong because it undercounts the new species. The '10' option is wrong because it doubles the count. The '8' option is wrong because it overcounts them. Memory hook: Allographa, five new, Western Ghats. ↑ Q9
10. **B.** Gegeneophis chandgadi is a caecilian, a legless burrowing amphibian. It was found in Chandgad, Kolhapur, in the northern Western Ghats. ↑ Q10

11. **A.** The correct answer is 1 and 3 only. R. retusa is indeed a monopodial epiphyte and the state flower of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, but it is listed under CITES Appendix II, not Appendix I -- a frequent trap. ↑ Q11
12. **C.** The correct answer is Orchidaceae. Rhynchostylis retusa is a monopodial epiphyte within the Vanda alliance of the orchid family. ↑ Q12
13. **B.** Angiosperms produce flowers as their reproductive structure, giving them this alternative common name. ↑ Q13

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **False.** ↑ 3
4. **True.** ↑ 4
5. **False.** ↑ 5
6. **True.** ↑ 6

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