



photo by Julie Vanderwilt

# Begonia 'Rufida'

by Morris Mueller

Begonia 'Rufida' is a hybrid shrub-like begonia hybridized by Constance Bower in 1937. It is the result of the cross of B. 'Viaudii' X B. 'Prunifolia.' B. 'Prunifolia' is a seedling B. 'Viaudii.' B. 'Viaudii' in turn is a seedling of B. 'Duchartrei' X B. 'Pictaviensis.' These are all shrub-like begonias rarely seen today in cultivation.

Ed and Millie Thompson in their book *BEGONIAS: The Complete Reference Guide* describe it as "shrub-like, hairy-leaved, wide-leaved" with pink flowers with scarlet hairs on the outside. The photographer, Julie Vanderwilt, reports that the flowers in her picture are three inches from petal tip to petal tip!

The flower color in the photo differs from the Thompson description. It is at most, pinkish white with scarlet hairs. The flowers of each parent are white with white hairs.

The Thompsons describe the leaf size as over three inches and note that plants in this group generally are tall growers. They further list B. 'Rufida' as for the 'Advanced Grower.'

There are two other descriptions of this plant that are more complete than the Thompsons'. The following is from Bessie Buxton's *Begonias and How to Grow Them* (1946). "It has a frosted appearance because of the silky white hairs (on the leaves). The stems and underside of the leaves are red, the upper side bright olive-green with good lustre. The leaves are quite one-sided, broad, with a long point and conspicuous

depressed veins. They are soft and thin, and burn easily, so should have only a little morning sun."

She further reports that the flowers are "apparently bright red" but "they really are white, thickly set with red hairs."

Helen Krauss writes the following in her book *Begonias for American Homes and Gardens* (1947): "... leaves to five inches long, ovate-pointed and harder textured than most begonias in this class . . . , flower stalks up to twenty inches long; flowers large, pale pink . . . "

The difference in descriptions by these two authors of the leaf texture and flower color is probably due to the light conditions under which the plants were grown.

Interestingly, there are no recorded hybrids made using this beautifully-flowered plant.

The care and culture of B. 'Rufida' is typical for shrub begonias in general. Good morning sun and shade in the heat of the day are optimal. Hairy-leaved begonias need less sun than smooth-leaved ones. Because this plant can reach a height of five feet, pinching is needed to make it fuller. Pale foliage indicates too much light while foliage that is too dark or oversized shows insufficient light.

Shrub begonias are good for our conditions as they are generally not too particular about humidity. Also, standard begonia mix with typical watering and fertilizing will result in a beautiful plant.

