



photo by Paul TSAMTSIS

## *Begonia paulensis* A. DC.

by Paul Tsamtsis

*Begonia paulensis* is a species classified in *BEGONIAS: The Complete Reference Guide* by Ed and Millie Thompson as rhizomatous, distinctive foliage, unusual surface and/or unusual coloring, large-leaved (generally over six inches at maturity). The leaves are peltate which means that they are attached to the stem inside the margins of the leaf (like water lilies). The surface of the medium green leaves is puckered and the combination of the the veining and puckering looks like the classic shape of a spider web. As the leaves unfold, they are flushed a pinkish-red that fades with maturity.

*B. paulensis* was identified in 1859 by Alphonse De Candolle. It was first found growing near São Paulo, Brazil, thus its name. In the rules of nomenclature, when you see a word ending in *-ensis*, it means 'the place from which'. So *paulensis* is a reference to being found near São Paulo (which is Portuguese for Saint Paul).

It looks very similar to *B. gehrtii* Irmsher which

the Thompsons place in the same class as *B. paulensis*. *B. gehrtii* has longer leaves and none of the red that *B. paulensis* shows in juvenile leaves.

Here in Sacramento there is a difference of opinion in culture about this plant. There are those that say *B. paulensis* should be grown in a greenhouse for success. There are others who grow it in home conditions in north windows. Interestingly, those that grow *B. paulensis* in a greenhouse have success with *B. gehrtii* in regular conditions. And those that grow *B. paulensis* in the home have little to no luck with *B. gehrtii* there. I have grown *B. paulensis* in my north-facing front parlor for nearly ten years with great success.

*B. paulensis* should dry between waterings and appreciates weak fertilizing often during the growing season which is spring through fall. A loose, organic mix with perlite adds to the success of growing it. Propagation is through leaves, seeds or rhizome cuttings. Although it is listed by the Thompsons as a plant for the collector, it is well worth trying.

