



photo by Marvin Vipond

## Begonia 'Looking Glass'

by Joan Coulat

Begonia 'Looking Glass' is an extremely distinctive cane-like hybrid created by noted hybridizer and Branch member, Patrick Worley. It has been around for approximately 15 years and was awarded the Best New Introduction at a national convention and show.

It is classified as a Superba. Its leaves can measure nearly a foot by 7" or 8". The obverse of the leaves is solid silver only broken by dark green bands following the veins. The reverse is a rich oxblood-red. The flowers are a medium pink. It is a shy bloomer and is really grown for its attractive and eye-catching foliage. A well-grown specimen can easily reach six feet in height.

There is no doubt that this plant is a hybrid that was planned. It was bred specifically to create a silver-leaved cane that consistently produced those silver leaves. All too often a plant with a silver pattern to its leaves only shows it in juvenile leaves or on leaves that grow under certain temperature or light conditions.

Classic selective breeding techniques used two unnamed canes with complex

backgrounds created by Worley. He used other plants with the potential to produce silver-leaved progeny to make these two parents, including the attractive, but somewhat difficult B. 'Orpha C. Fox.' Careful selection and back-crossing resulted in a generation that contained four with nearly solid silver leaves. Only one of those was selected and named B. 'Looking Glass.'

Culture is basically the same as for other canes. The soil mix should be loose and well-draining. Fertilizing should be done according to package directions during the growing season.

If grown in conditions that become cool as the days grow short, the plant will tend toward dormancy as reflected in some degree of leaf drop. Stop fertilizing and reduce watering. If it is being grown in the house or a heated green house, this dormancy will be barely noticed. This plant also experiences attacks of powdery mildew, particularly toward the end of the summer and early fall. Preventative spraying with a product like Bayleton works wonders. Mealy bugs tend to like this plant a little more than others, so vigilance and an effective pest management program are recommended if mealy bugs are spotted.

