



photos by Paul Tsamtsis

## Begonia 'Michael Brigham'

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Begonia 'Michael Brigham' is classified as rhizomatous, rhizome jointed-at-or-below the soil level, with upright stems. It is one of the group of plants that has *B. deliciosa* in its background from which it gets this upright growth habit. In other words, it looks as if it could be a shrub-like begonia, but actually grows from a rhizome. This plant was introduced to our area by Branch member Bob Hamm.

Other hybrids with this growth habit include *B. 'Charles Jaros,' B. 'Regalia,'* and the sister seedling hybrids of Martin Johnson, *B. 'Connee Boswell'* and *B. 'Little Brother Montgomery.'* All these plants grow with a parted or star-shaped leaf. The foliage of *B. 'Michael Brigham'* is a darkish green-brown and is marked with random silver splashes and spots. This is in contrast to most of the other hybrids of this type which generally have banded patterns on the leaves following the outline of the leaf. The bands of *B. 'Connee Boswell'* are pink and silver and lavender; those of *B. 'Little Brother Montgomery'* are primarily silver and brown.

Its growth pattern is low, rarely reaching over two feet in height. It does make a nice clump; as the rhizomes slowly spread on the soil surface, they continue to put up upright stems. Like its parent, its bloom season starts in fall and can go through early spring. Flowers are pale pinkish-white.



Because *B. deliciosa* comes from the Himalayan foothills, its hybrids tend to be more cold-hardy. Many of them can be grown as landscape plants in the more cold-protected areas of Sacramento. Bob grew *B. deliciosa* right in the ground when he lived in the Central City. Usually the upright stems would fall off in the deepest cold and fog, but would readily sprout each spring as the weather warmed up.

Culture is basically the same as for other rhizomes. The soil mix should be loose and well-draining. Fertilizing should be done according to package directions during the growing season which is spring through fall. If grown as a houseplant in the winter, it is better grown under lights where 'longer' days can be provided. Shorter days, coupled with cooler temperatures tend to start this plant toward dormancy. My experience is that if extra light is not provided, but warmer temperatures are maintained, the foliage remains, but new growth stops until the days start to lengthen.

Because *B. deliciosa* is in its parentage, this and other upright stemmed rhizomes are particularly popular with mealy bugs. So successful growth requires constant vigilance for the organic gardener, or an effective systemic for all others. Powdery mildew can also strike as the days become short, so preventative spraying with a systemic fungicide like Bayleton works wonders.