



photo by Julie Vanderwilt

*B. plebeja* puts on a great once-a-year display of blossoms.

## *Begonia plebeja* Lieb. By Morris Mueller

This plant was described by Lieberman in 1853. It had, however, been known for over 60 years as it was appeared as an illustration in a publication in 1770 (The Begonian, Jan/Feb 1983, p.8). There was some confusion out the true plant which Rudy Ziesenhenné corrected (The Begonian, April 1977). There is also the possibility that it may be being grown as *B. brooksii* (hort.). Its natural range is in Central America.

Millie Thompson classifies it as an erect rhizome of small size. Its leaves are classified as entire/subentire, having a fine-toothed edge and brown fuzz as a leaf coating.

There is some difference of opinion regarding the color of its flowers. The Thompsons classify the color as greenish-white, while Rudy Ziesenhenné describes them as pink in his 1977 article previously referenced. The plant pictured here was obtained from Rudy and grown in the Santa Barbara area. This flower difference could be that the West Coast and Thompson plants are different or that growing conditions, such as brighter light over a longer

growing period may result in a deeper flower color. Both the Thompsons and Rudy agree that flowering is moderate and occurs from December to early spring.

The Thompsons label this plant as one for the Advanced Collector and I feel I must agree. I have had it a number of years and it has indeed been a difficult plant to keep alive. It tends to go dormant toward fall and in the spring, the growing tip seems to have died and if the plant grows, it will be from side shoots from the rhizome.

Despite this lack of vigor, it does not get mildew for me and seems resistant to mealy bug.

Interestingly, *B. plebeja* and *B. brooksii* (hort.) each have two hybrids listing them as a parent.

The plant that caused the early confusion regarding the true *B. plebeja* has since been identified as *B. tenuipila* var. *kennedyi*. This plant has much different foliage from *B. plebeja*. It has maroonish marking in between the leaf veins. While it is slow growing, it seems to be a more vigorous plant for me.

