



photo by Paul Tsamtsis

Begonia 'Essie Hunt'

by Morris Mueller

Begonia 'Essie Hunt' was hybridized by Mae Blanton of Texas in 1974. Jack Golding and Dieter Wasshausen in **Begoniaceae, Edition 2** list the cross as *B. conchifolia* var. *rubrimacula* X *B. manicata* 'Aureo-maculata Crispa.' Horticulturally, the first plant is also known as *B. conchifolia* 'Zip.'

It has characteristics from both parents. The rhizomes grow erratically, sometimes erect and then downwards. It does not branch freely, which often leads to a lopsided plant. The leaves are smooth with a fringe of tiny hairs on the crested margins. The truly identifying characteristic of the leaves is the red outlining of the major veins which produces a red star on the top of the leaf around the umbo. (The umbo is the place where the petiole is attached to the leaf blade.) The leaves are thick, smooth, and medium green if given sufficient light.

As with most other rhizomatous plants, *B. 'Essie Hunt'* blooms in winter. The flowers are light pink and moderate in quantity. In Ed and Millie Thompson's **BEGONIAS: The Complete Reference Guide**, there is a black and white photo of the plant on page 165.

Culture is the general one provided for rhizomatous plants. This plant seems to have no special needs. However, the stronger the light, the darker the leaves will be. Because of its growth habit of long-ish rhizomes with little branching, it is a good candidate for hanging baskets. *B. 'Essie Hunt'* is not a fast grower, but

this is somewhat compensated for by the fact that it holds on to its leaves for a long time and doesn't get leggy as might be expected. The Thompsons list it as for 'The Advanced Grower' but my experience is that it is an easy plant. This plant roots readily from leaf wedges. A fuller plant can be achieved more quickly by starting it from a leaf cone where a whole leaf is folded into a cone shape, put into the rooting mix with a little of the mix put into the center of the cone to anchor it.

In 1975 a very similar plant was produced in Japan by Hiroshi Shigemi. It is *B. 'Nagare'* and is the result of the reverse cross of *B. 'Essie Hunt.'*, i.e., *B. manicata* 'Aureo-maculata Crispa' X *B. conchifolia* var. *rubrimacula*. Placed side-by-side, the two plants seem identical. The only difference I have observed is that *B. 'Nagare'* grows even more slowly than *B. 'Essie Hunt.'* It is also less likely to branch.

In addition, both plants have fine hairs on the petioles of new leaves which are lost as the leaf matures.

The only hybrid using either parent was *B. 'Essie Hunt'* X *B. carrieae* done by Pat Maley in 1979. She named it *B. 'Mount Soledad'* and registered it with the ABS as #860. Pat was a Sacramento Branch member for several years in the 1980s.

Lastly, there is a mutation listed for *B. 'Essie Hunt.'* It was discovered and released in 1981 by the plant's hybridizer, Mae Blanton. It is a variegated plant which she named *B. 'Glennis Crouch.'* It was registered as #916.

