



photo by Paul Tsamtsis

Begonia 'Richard Robinson'

by Morris Mueller

Begonia 'Richard Robinson' is a very old sport/hybrid grown originally in 1925 by Alfred D. Robinson of San Diego and a pioneer grower of begonias in America.

He planted seed of *B. dregei* 'Macbethii' that he had selfed to prove it was indeed a species. Of the many hundreds of seedlings he grew to maturity, one was unique. He named it for his father. Whether or not this is therefore a sport or a hybrid remains open to opinion as no one has ever reported selfing it. (For that matter, no one reports ever using it for any hybridization.)

The plant is classified as tuberous, semi-tuberous by the Thompsons in their **BEGONIAS: The Complete Reference Guide**. Thus, it has a partial dormancy phase, during which careful watering is needed. It can go dry to the point of wilting, but comes back after watering. As with most plants in this classification, over-watering is the greatest danger.

The Thompsons also report *B. 'Richard Robinson'* has white flowers in winter/spring. (Mine has never bloomed!) Because of its need for careful watering, it is not a plant for the beginning begonia grower.

While not easy, given that it has been around so long, it shows that a great enough number of growers meet its needs to continue to propagate and share this plant. Except for watering, its needs are those that are standard for most other begonias — humidity, light, and fertilizer.

Leaves look like 'cut-leaf maple,' silver over green with a red umbo and brown-red veins. Because of its *dregei* connection, mildew is a concern, but not as bad as the plain species.

Generally leaves are one to two inches in length except if grown in the ground where they will become larger.

B. 'Richard Robinson' is mentioned in all three of the early begonia books by Brilmayer, Buxton, and Krauss, but little information is given other than citing the plant. This also holds true for **the Begonian**; as of 1990 there is no single citation mentioned. Alice Clark gives a vivid description of the plant on page 130 and a black and white drawing on page 131 of her book, **Begonia Portraits**, which is available in our Branch library.

I find it amazing that a plant that has been around for over 75 years has had so little written about it.

