



photos by Paul Tsamtsis

Begonia 'Cachuma'

by Morris Mueller

This rhizomatous begonia is one of my favorite plants. It was hybridized in 1973 by Rudy Ziesenhenné (B. *carriæ* X B. unknown). He named it for a recreational lake in the mountains above Santa Barbara that supplies the majority of the community's water.

While I have little luck in growing the female plant, B. *carriæ* and most of its hybrids, this plant is a top performer for me.

At maturity, leaves measure 15" by 12" with petioles covered with long, scale-like 3/8" reddish hairs (a fun plant to touch and pet). It blooms in late winter on three-foot stems with pink flowers up to 1 1/2" in diameter.

B. 'Cachuma' was registered with the ABS in 1975 as #439. The Thompsons, in their book ***BEGONIAS: The Complete Reference Guide***, list it as for the Advanced Grower. My experience is that it is one of the easier grown plants. A primary reason is that it does not go into a winter dormancy as do so many other rhizome hybrids which then require a different care.

It has been used to create many other hybrids, including B. 'All-American Boy,' B. 'Collage' *grex*, B. 'Decoder Ring,' B. 'Denton L. Cole,' B. 'Jack Armstrong,' B. 'Lime Freeze,' B. 'Puberty,' B. 'Ron Cat' *grex*, and B. 'Young Boy.' Unfortunately, I have never had an opportunity to grow any of these plants. A *grex* is a name

given to all the seedlings of a given cross. Normally, begonia hybridizers will name only a specific plant or plants from a cross they have done. But sometimes the hybridizer will name the cross itself, and that is a *grex*. While individually named hybrids will always look like each other, plants with a *grex* name can look quite different from each other. *Grexes* are standard in the world of orchids. One last thing . . . when a *grex* is named for crossing two plants, anyone else who performs that same cross must use that name again.

B. 'Cachuma' requires no extraordinary care. It should, as with most rhizomatous plants, be allowed to almost dry out between watering. It is not subject to mildew if kept inside during winter; outside it will get gray mold on older leaves.

The plant can be easily propagated from whole leaves, wedges, or parts of the rhizome. If pinched, or the growing tip is cut off, it will send out new shoots along the rhizome. If this is not done, this particular hybrid will grow a very long rhizome before sending out new shoots near its origin. (It's the equivalent of a tall-growing cane that resists being bushy unless pinched.)

Fertilize every two weeks with full strength or every week at half-strength to achieve maximum growth. This regimen can be maintained year 'round if the plant is protected from cold weather.

