



photo by Donna Strand

## Begonia 'Midnight Sun'

by Paul Tsamtsis

B. 'Midnight Sun' is one of those great hybrids that comes along about once a decade. It is a shrub-like plant with distinctive foliage hybridized by Byron Martin of Logee's Greenhouses in Danielson, Connecticut.

Its parents are B. 'Jill Adair' X B. *solimutata*. That second plant goes by a host of other names. Before it was identified, it was called B. 'Burle Marx' (after Roberto Burle Marx, a well-known Brazilian plant collector). It was assigned B U003 as part of the ABS unidentified species classification system. It was also incorrectly called B. *glaziovii* for a while.

Byron reports that after the seeds were sown, about one hundred of the most vigorous seedlings were selected to grow on. Three or four of those showed pink edges. As the seedlings grew to maturity, those that exhibited the pink edge started showing white and pink throughout the leaf. As the leaves aged, they darkened to a deeper olive green. The reverse was a bright, medium red. The most vigorous plant was selected for release. It won the Best New Hybrid Introduction in 1980, a well-deserved honor.

Variegation in begonias is quite unusual. Some variegated begonias are B. *manicata* var. 'Aureo-

maculata,' B. 'Glynnis Crouch' (a sport of B. 'Essie Hunt'), a variegated form of B. *prismatocarpa*, an unnamed sport of 'Dainty Maid,' and many of the semperflorens hybrids like B. 'Charm.' B. 'Midnight Sun' is even more unusual in that it is pink and white, while most other begonia variegation contains cream, white and yellowish foliage.

The flowers are fluted and variable in size. They are white and flushed with a bright pink to red coloration.

Propagation is done with stem cuttings and can be quite difficult. In fact, I find this plant difficult to grow while in a four-inch pot. As it gets bigger, it gets easier. I have also found that it does like to grow on the drier side.

Logee's Greenhouses still carries it in their catalogue although supplies can be limited because of the previously mentioned difficulty with propagation.

Fortunately pests or diseases usually do not bother this beautiful plant. It is not a common plant, but certainly one that will attract attention in anyone's collection. The plant pictured above was grown by Bob Golden and Iris Bird and won Best in Show at this past August's ABS National Convention, **Back to the Future: Species, Seeds and Beyond**, held in San Diego.

