



photo by Julie Vanderwilt

Begonia gehrtii Irmsher

by Morris Mueller

Begonia gehrtii was described by Edgar Irmsher in 1959. It was discovered in Brazil, quite recent by begonia standards. Unless seen side-by-side, it can be confused with *B. paulensis*, another Brazilian species. Both are from the section *Pritzelia* indicating they are closely related.

B. gehrtii is classified by the Thompsons in **BEGONIAS: The Complete Reference Guide** as rhizomatous, distinctive foliage, unusual surface and/or unusual coloring, large leaved (generally over 6 inches at maturity). Leaf shape is peltate, with red hairs on the veins on the reverse and white hairy petioles. Although the Thompsons list it as For the Collector, I do not find it particularly hard to grow.

Culturally it prefers humidity of 50 to 60 percent, but it will survive with 40 percent (causing brown-edged leaves). The growing mix should be allowed almost to dry out completely between waterings. It is best not to get water on the rhizomes.

As it is a creeping rhizome, it can be grown in a hanging basket. It also does well as a regular potted plant. It is best grown under lights, in a greenhouse, or on an east-facing windowsill, so long as humidity levels can be maintained. Too much sun will burn the leaves.

Propagation is best from seed or pieces of rhizome. I can get leaves to root, but they never produce plants for me. I have had one leaf sit for a year before 'giving up the ghost.'

This plant has not bloomed for me so I do not know the flower color, although from the light green leaves, I would guess they are white.

B. gehrtii has not been used extensively for hybridizing. As a seed parent (female) it has been used to create *B. 'Jabberwocky'* by Logee's. As a pollen parent (male) Patrick Worley created *B. 'Paul Hernandez'* by crossing it with *B. luxurians*; *B. 'Dale Kramer'* by crossing it with *B. odetientha*; and *B. 'Alhambra'* by crossing it with *B. olsoniae*.

