



photo by Julie Vanderwilt

Begonia mannii Hooker f.

by Morris Mueller

Begonia mannii was described by J D Hooker in 1864. It was discovered in 1862 by Gustav Mann on the peak of the island of Bioko (Fernando Po) in the Indian Ocean. Its range is from Guinea to Gabon in Africa.

It is contained in the section Tetraphila. The Thompsons, in their **BEGONIAS: The Complete Reference Guide** classify it as a trailing scandent, species. They also list it as 'For the Collector' although I think any grower with some experience can have success with it.

B. mannii, like many others included in Section Tetraphila, is a trailing plant of which about 45 species are included. Some of the cultivated species are *B. eminii*, *B. kisuluana*, *B. komoensis*, *B. loranthoides*, *B. molleri* and *B. polygonoides*, all of which I have grown along with *B. mannii*.

This plant is epiphytic, with fleshy smooth leaves on short petioles and fairly close

internodes. It blooms fairly readily with red or dark pink flowers close to the stem. Unlike most begonias where the seed pod has wings and when ripe contains dry, round loose seeds, the seed pod for *B. mannii* is elongated without wings and has seeds contained in a pulp when ripe.

Its natural range gives strong clues as to its care. While it prefers humidity, it is not a terrarium plant. Culturally, *B. mannii* must be grown as a hanging plant in semi-shade. It grows best in a moss-lined basket, but I have also grown it in a plastic container. Water and fertilize regularly, but water less often in plastic as it likes to dry out somewhat between waterings. It grows well in my standard loose potting mix. Another member in the Branch has success growing it in New Zealand sphagnum moss that is dredged while wet in his soilless mix.

There are no listed hybrids using *B. mannii*. This plant or others from this Section are a great way for a moderately experienced grower to start growing begonias of a more unusual and more challenging nature.

