



photo by Ed and Millie Thompson

Begonia poculifera HOOKER F.

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African begonia species have fascinated me for a very long time because they are not only attractive but they possess interesting characteristics. I received this African begonia species from Dr. Jan Doorenbos who generously shared cuttings and seeds of many African species. On January 11, 1984, I received seeds that were from a plant collected in Gabon.

B. poculifera was first collected by Gustav Mann before 1871 in Upper Guinea in the Cameroon Mountains at an altitude of 4,000 feet and on the west African island of Fernando-Po at an altitude of 2,000 ft. Joseph Dalton Hooker, author of the species, designated these collections as the type specimens. The name and botanical description were validly published in 1871 by Joseph Dalton Hooker in Daniel Oliver's *Flora of Tropical Africa*. The name of the species, *poculifera*, comes from the Latin *poculiformis* which means cup-shape; the name refers to the cup-shaped bracts that envelope the inflorescences. For botanical classification, *B. poculifera* is placed in the section *Squamibegonia*. The other species in this section in cultivation is *B. ampla* (see March 2006 Plant of the Month).

Consideration of the natural habitat of a particular species is important when trying to grow difficult and rare species in cultivation. All the places where this species has been collected are in the tropical portion

of West Africa near the equator where temperatures are high and steady all year. The humidity and rainfall are also high. Since this species was collected in a fairly wide range of altitudes and since temperature lowers with altitude, it is safe to assume that it would tolerate various temperatures starting at 62-65 degrees, and undoubtedly tolerate temperature to 55 degrees.

B. poculifera is a trailing-scandent species which according to Hooker will get stems that reach 16 feet long in the wilds. Stems are smooth and glossy with some scattered scaly hairs. The oblique ovate fleshy leaves are deep green with a fine red margin and deep red veins. The undersurface is a red-tinted lighter green. Both upper and lower surfaces are covered with scaly hairs. The leaf margin is entire and the apex is acuminate.

B. poculifera starts blooming in February. The flower stalks are about 1" long that end with 2 broadly rounded light green bracts that form a bell shaped cup; this envelopes the several flowered inflorescences with the flowers protruding one at a time. The fruit is berry-like, indehiscent and thick.

The ideal conditions for this species is the greenhouse with controlled humidity and temperature where it can be grown in a moss-lined hanging basket. However, a terrarium can be used. The species will swirl around the terrarium - not the ideal growing environment, but you can observe the interesting characteristics of the species.

