



photos by Millie Thompson

Begonia bipinnatifida J J Smith

by Millie Thompson
Southampton, New York

B. bipinnatifida was found and collected in 1903 in Netherlands New Guinea. It was found in primeval forest growing high on Mount Horne in rocky places. In 1906, J. J. Smith published the original citation of *B. bipinnatifida* in *Bulletin du Departement de l'Agriculture aux Indies Neerlandaises*.

For botanical classification *B. bipinnatifida* is placed in the section **Petermannia** with *Begonia* species with like characteristics. Some other Asian species in this section that are presently in cultivation are *B. aequata*, *amphioxus*, *augustae*, *borneensis*, *breviramosa*, *chlorosticta*, *cumingii*, *malachosticta*, *palmata*, *polilloensis*, and *serratipetala*.

B. bipinnatifida is shrub-like with erect and semi erect deep red stems that are branched. The deep red stems are somewhat zig-zag from thickened node to thickened node. Average mature leaves measure 5 inches in length and 2 inches wide. The upper surface of the leaves is deep green; in contrast, the undersurface is deep red. Leaf shape is obliquely

oblong-ovate with an acute apex and an obliquely obtuse or slightly semi-cordate base. The leaf is deeply twice-divided outward on both sides of the deep red midrib into twelve to sixteen narrow taper-pointed divisions. The name *B. bipinnatifida* comes from the Latin *bipinnatus* which means twice pinnate; each division of the pinnate leaf is also pinnate: this gives the leaves a fern-like appearance.

B. bipinnatifida blooms infrequently and the flowers are tiny. The female flowers have five unequal pink tepals that are oblong or elliptic-obtuse. The styles and stigmas are golden yellow; threadlike erect styles are diverging and the velvety semi-crescent shaped stigmas are somewhat twisted. The deep pink ovary has three wings. Male flowers have two kidney-shaped pink tepals.

B. bipinnatifida requires high humidity; this can usually be accomplished in a greenhouse or a terrarium. Careful watering and regular fertilizing are important. It can be a challenging species to grow but given the correct growing environment and care it grows into an outstanding species to enjoy.

